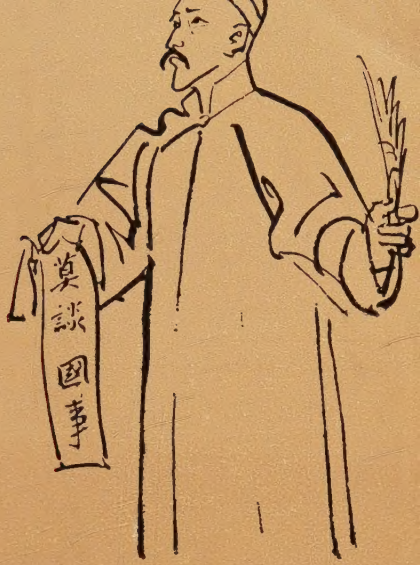
茶館



TEAHOUSE

LAO SHE

SET in a typical, old Beijing teahouse, Lao She's drama follows the lives of the owner and his customers through three stages in modern Chinese history. The play spans fifty years and has a cast of over sixty characters drawn from all levels of society. Brought together in Yutai Teahouse, they reflect, through the changes in their own lives, the changes that were taking place in Chinese society.

The strength and appeal of the play lie in part in Lao She's masterful recreation of the characters and language of the streets of old Beijing, but the centre of its strength is Lao She's vision, his unerring choice of significant detail, and his familiarity with the old society he is describing, with its strengths, weaknesses, and ironies. It is this which carries *Teahouse* beyond the borders of social criticism and makes it a complex and living work of art. Written in 1957, *Teahouse* bids an inspired, lingering farewell to old Beijing and the old society, despite their evils and ills, and extends a passionate welcome to the new society with its promise of freedom and equality for the people.

Standing as it does between old and new China, and deeply rooted in both. *Teahouse* shimmers with a fine sense of ambivalence. True to its writer, to China, and to its time, it is a masterpiece of modern theatre.

Jacket drawings by Ye Qianyu

WA Callahan
北京 '86

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TEAHOUSE

A Play in Three Acts

LAO SHE

Translated by
JOHN HOWARD-GIBBON

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CHARACTERS

(Ages given are those at first appearance.)

WANG LIFA A few years over twenty. Because of his father's early death, he became proprietor of Yutai Teahouse while still very young. He is shrewd and somewhat self-centred, but means well.

SOOTHSAYER TANG An opium addict in his thirties; makes a living telling fortunes by reading faces.

SECOND ELDER SONG About thirty years old; timid but talkative.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG In his thirties. An habitué of Yutai Teahouse as is his good friend Second Elder Song. Chang is a well-built and morally upright man.

THIRD-BORN LI Over thirty years old. A waiter in Yutai Teahouse; kind-hearted and conscientious.

ERDEZI In his twenties. He is engaged by the Wrestling Academy, an athletic front organization which provided muscle for the government.

FIFTH ELDER MA In his thirties. He uses his connection with the Western church to lord it over his compatriots.

POCKFACE LIU A cruel and treacherous flesh merchant; in his thirties.

SIXTH-BORN KANG Forty years old. An indigent peasant from the outskirts of Beijing.

FATSO HUANG In his forties. An important gangland figure.

QIN ZHONGYI Wang Lifa's landlord; in his twenties. Born into wealth, he eventually turns to capitalist investment. A follower of the Reformists.

OLD MAN Eighty-two years old; alone and penniless.

PEASANT WOMAN In her thirties. So poor she must sell her daughter.

LITTLE GIRL Ten-year-old daughter of the Peasant Woman.

EUNUCH PANG A forty-year-old palace eunuch. Having become rich, he is seeking a wife.

LITTLE OX In his teens. Eunuch Pang's attendant.

SONG ENZI Over twenty. An old-style police agent.

WU XIANGZI In his twenties, he is Song Enzi's partner.

KANG SHUNZI The fifteen-year-old daughter of Sixth-Born Kang, sold to Eunuch Pang to be his wife.

WANG SHUFEN About forty years old. The wife of Proprietor Wang Lifa; more straightforward and just than her husband.

POLICEMAN In his twenties.

PAPERBOY Sixteen years old.

KANG DALI Twelve years old. The purchased son of Eunuch Pang. He and Kang Shunzi become inseparable.

OLD LIN In his thirties. A deserter.

OLD CHEN In his thirties. A deserter. Old Lin's sworn brother.

CUI JIUFENG In his forties. Formerly a member of the Legislative Assembly, he later turned from public life to Buddhism and moved into the lodging house run by Yutai Teahouse.

ARMY OFFICER Thirty years old.

WANG DASHUAN About forty years old. An upright man, he is the eldest son of Proprietor Wang.

ZHOU XIUHUA Forty-year-old wife of Wang Dashuan.

WANG XIAOHUA Thirteen-year-old daughter of Wang Dashuan.

DING BAO Seventeen years old. A "come-on hostess" who is brave and intelligent.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU In his thirties. Pockface Liu's son, he has carried on and expanded his father's business.

LIGHTBILL COLLECTOR In his forties.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG In his thirties. The son of Soothsayer Tang, he carries on his father's game, but hopes to become a Taoist Master.

CHEF MING In his fifties, he caters for banquets.

ZOU FUYUAN In his forties. A well-known professional storyteller.

WEI FUXI In his thirties. A student of the same master that Zou studied under, he at first worked as a storyteller, but later turned to singing Beijing Opera.

SIXTH-BORN FANG In his forties. A crafty dealer in secondhand items.

CHE DANGDANG About thirty years old. A speculator in silver dollars.

FOURTH AUNT PANG Forty years old. An ugly woman who has delusions of becoming Empress. She is the wife of Eunuch Pang's fourth nephew.

CHUN MEI Nineteen years old. Fourth Aunt Pang's bondservant.

OLD YANG A pedlar in his thirties.

LITTLE ERDEZI The thirty-year-old son of Erdezi. A hired thug.

YU HOUZHAI In his forties. Wang Xiaohua's primary school teacher.

XIE YONGREN In his thirties. Yu Houzhai's colleague.

LITTLE SONG ENZI About thirty years old. Like his father, Song Enzi, he is a police agent.

LITTLE WU XIANGZI About thirty years old. Like his father Wu Xiangzi, a police agent.

LITTLE XINYAN Nineteen years old. A "come-on hostess".

DIRECTOR SHEN Forty years old. A department chief in the Kuomintang Special Police Force.

TEAHOUSE CUSTOMERS All male.
TWO WAITERS Both male.
REFUGEES Male and female, young and old.
SOLDIERS
TEAHOUSE LODGERS All male.
EXÉCUTION SQUAD Seven in number.
KUOMINTANG SPECIAL POLICE Four men.
ODDBALL YANG A ballad-monger.

Act One

CHARACTERS: Wang Lifa, Pockface Liu, Eunuch Pang, Soothsayer Tang, Sixth-Born Kang, Little Ox, Second Elder Song, Fatso Huang, Song Enzi, Fourth Elder Chang, Qin Zhongyi, Wu Xiangzi, Third-Born Li, Old Man, Kang Shunzi, Erdezi, Peasant Woman, four Teahouse Customers, Fifth Elder Ma, Little Girl, two Waiters.

TIME: Early autumn, 1898. The Reform Movement of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and their adherents has failed. Morning.

PLACE: Beijing. Yutai Teahouse.

SCENE: Large teahouses like this are no longer to be seen, but a few decades ago every district in Beijing had at least one, where in addition to tea, simple snacks and meals were served. Every day bird fanciers, after strolling about with their caged orioles and thrushes, would come in to rest awhile, enjoy a pot of tea, and compare the singing abilities of their birds. Go-betweens and those who had deals to discuss also frequented such teahouses. In those days there would often be quarrels between gangs, but there were always friends about to calm things down. The two sides would crowd around these mediators who would reason first with one side then the other; then they would all drink tea and down bowls of noodles with minced pork (a specialty of the large teahouses — cheap and quickly prepared), hostility transformed to hospitality. In sum, the teahouse was an important institution of those times, a place where people came to transact business, or simply to while away the time.

In the teahouses one could hear the most absurd stories, such as how in a certain place a huge spider had turned

into a demon and was then struck by lightning. One could also come in contact with the strangest views; for example, that foreign troops could be prevented from landing by building a Great Wall along the sea coast. Here one might also hear about the latest tune composed by some Beijing Opera star, or the best way to prepare opium. In the teahouses one might also see rare art objects newly acquired by some patron — a jade fan pendant, recently unearthed, or a three-colour glazed snuff bottle. Yes, the teahouse was indeed an important place; it could even be reckoned a kind of cultural centre.

We are about to see just such a teahouse.

Just inside the main entrance is the counter and a cookstove — to make things simpler, the stove can be dispensed with if the clatter of pots and pans is heard off stage. The room should be large and high-ceilinged, with both oblong tables and square ones, and traditional teahouse benches and stools. Through the window an inner courtyard can be seen with more benches and stools under a high awning. In the teahouse and under the awning there are hooks for hanging bird cages. Pasted up everywhere are notices: "Don't discuss state affairs."

Two unidentified patrons, their eyes narrowed, their heads nodding, are softly singing an opera tune, beating the time with their hands. Two or three more patrons are totally enthralled by a cricket in an earthenware jar. Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi, wearing grey gowns, are talking secretively. Judging by their appearance they are police agents from the Northern Yamen.

Today, another quarrel has broken out between two gangs; the dispute is said to be over a pigeon. It seemed that it could not be settled without resort to violence, in which case someone would surely have been killed because vicious thugs from the Wrestling Academy and the Guards from the Imperial Storehouses had been hired. Fortunately, before they could come to blows, a mediator intervened. The two sides are about to meet in the teahouse. In

twos and threes, looking fierce and arrogant, and dressed in short fighting attire the thugs enter the teahouse and head for the inner courtyard.

Fifth Elder Ma sits by himself in an inconspicuous corner drinking tea.

Wang Lifa is sitting on a high stool behind the counter.

Soothsayer Tang enters in tattered shoes, wearing a very long and very filthy cotton gown, some scraps of paper tucked behind one ear.

WANG LIFA: Older Tang, why don't you take a walk, eh?

SOOTHSAYER TANG (*with a wan smile*): Proprietor Wang, show a little kindness to old Soothsayer Tang a bit. Give me a bowl of tea and I'll tell you your fortune. Come on, let me see your palm — won't cost you a cent. (*Not waiting for Wang's agreement, takes hold of his hand.*) It's 1898, the twenty-fourth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. And your age. . . .

WANG LIFA (*snatching his hand away*): Forget it! There's no need to ply me with that old fortuneteller's gab — I'll give you a bowl of tea. Fortunetelling's useless. In this country people like us are always the underdogs anyway. (*Comes out from behind his counter and guides Soothsayer Tang to a seat.*) Sit down. You know, if you don't break that opium habit nothing good will ever come your way. That's my way of telling fortunes — much more effective than yours.

(*Carrying bird cages, Second Elder Song and Fourth Elder Chang enter. Wang Lifa greets them. After hanging up their cages they look for a place to sit. Second Elder Song, who has a scholarly air about him, has a small oriole cage; Fourth Elder Chang, a vigorous looking fellow, has a much larger thrush cage. The teahouse waiter, Third-Born Li, comes over quickly, fills their bowls with boiling water and replaces the lids. They have brought their own tea leaves. When the tea has properly steeped, Song and Chang politely proffer some to the guests around them.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG and FOURTH ELDER CHANG: You should really try this. (*They then look in the direction of the inner courtyard.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG: Looks like trouble again.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: But nothing will come of it. If they really wanted to fight they'd have gone outside the city long ago, eh? What's the point of coming to the teahouse? (*Erdezi, a hired bully, enters just in time to overhear Fourth Elder Chang.*)

ERDEZI (*confronting him*): You. Who do you think you're talking about?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*unwilling to back down*): What's it to you? I've paid for my tea — surely I don't have to answer to anyone.

SECOND ELDER SONG (*sizing up Erdezi*): Well, sir, I'd guess that you're from the Wrestling Academy, eh? Come on — sit down and have some tea. We are all men of the world.

ERDEZI: What I do is none of your business.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: If you want to frighten someone why don't you take on the foreigners? — they're a tough lot. You're in the government's pay, but I didn't see you rushing into the fray when the English and French destroyed Yuan Ming Yuan.

ERDEZI: To hell with the foreigners, I'm going to teach you a lesson instead. (*Raises his fists.*)

(*Other customers in the teahouse ignore the disturbance, but Wang Lifa rushes over.*)

WANG LIFA: Now, brothers, we're all neighbours. We should settle things reasonably. Sir, why don't you join them in the inner courtyard?

(*Erdezi, ignoring Wang Lifa, suddenly brushes a teabowl off the table, smashing it. He reaches out to grab Fourth Elder Chang by the collar.*)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*dodging*): You want to start something?

ERDEZI: Start something? So, I can't handle the foreigners,

eh? Well, I can sure handle you.

FIFTH ELDER MA (*without bothering to get up*): Erdezi, you're quite something.

ERDEZI (*looking around, spots Fifth Elder Ma*): Ho! Fifth Elder Ma, I didn't know you were here. How careless of me not to have noticed you. (*Goes over and drops to one knee in the traditional gesture of respect.*)

FIFTH ELDER MA: If there's a problem, you should settle it in an amiable way. What's the point of going around threatening people?

ERDEZI: Of course, sir. You're quite right. I'll go and join them in the inner courtyard. Third-Born Li, I'll pay for the tea at this table. (*Goes to inner courtyard.*)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*walking over to Fifth Elder Ma to continue his argument*): You, sir, you're an intelligent man. Who do you think's in the right?

FIFTH ELDER MA (*rising*): I've got other things to attend to. Goodbye. (*Exits.*)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*to Wang Lifa*): Oddball, that guy.

WANG LIFA: Didn't you know that's Fifth Elder Ma? You're probably on his black list now.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Do you think I've offended him? I should've taken the Almanac's advice and stayed home today.

WANG LIFA (*whispering*): You were just condemning the foreigners. Well, he works for the foreigners. Follows their religion, speaks their language. Whenever he wants something done he goes straight to the Magistrate of Wanping County. Why else would even officials be afraid of provoking him?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*going back to his seat*): Humph! I never have a good opinion of anyone who lives off the foreigners.

WANG LIFA (*tipping his head slightly in the direction of Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi, in a whisper*): Be careful what you say. (*Loudly.*) Third-Born Li, another bowl of tea for

this table. (*Picks up the shattered bits of the teabowl.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG: How much for the bowl? I'll pay for it. Gentlemen don't lower themselves to the antics of old women.

WANG LIFA: No hurry, we'll square up later. (*Moves away.*)

(*The flesh merchant Pockface Liu enters leading Sixth-Born Kang. Pockface Liu first greets Second Elder Song and Fourth Elder Chang.*)

POCKFACE LIU: You're early today, Gentlemen. (*Takes out his snuff-bottle and pours out a bit.*) Try this. It's just arrived — genuine English stuff. Fine and pure.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Ai! Even our snuff has to be imported. Just think how much silver goes out of the country to pay for it.

POCKFACE LIU: This Great Qing Empire of ours has mountains of gold and silver. We'll never use it all. Please be seated; I've got a bit of business to attend to. (*Takes Sixth-Born Kang to find a seat.*)

(*Third-Born Li brings over a bowl of tea.*)

POCKFACE LIU: Well, what do you say? How about ten taels of silver? Yes or no. I'm too busy to waste a lot of time with you.

SIXTH-BORN KANG: Elder Liu! Is a fifteen-year-old girl only worth ten taels?

POCKFACE LIU: If you sold her into a whorehouse you'd perhaps get a few taels more. But you're not willing to do that.

SIXTH-BORN KANG: She's my own flesh and blood. How can I. . . .

POCKFACE LIU: She's your own, but you can't afford to feed her. Whose fault is that?

SIXTH-BORN KANG: It's because it's impossible for us peasants to get by these days. If we could manage even a bowl of gruel a day for each of us, and I still wanted to sell my daughter — then, could I call myself a man?

POCKFACE LIU: That's you peasants' problem, not mine.

Yutai Teahouse (*Act One*).

Erdezi: "I'm going to teach you a lesson. . . ." (*Act One*).

Qin Zhongyi mocks Fourth Elder Chang for buying a bowl of noodles for the peasant woman who is there to sell her daughter (*Act One*).

Eunuch Pang wants to buy Kang Shunzi for wife. On seeing her husband-to-be, the distraught Kang Shunzi faints (*Act One*).

Warlord soldiers extorting money from Wang Lifa (*Act Two*).

Wang Lifa waits on Fourth Elder Chang and Second Elder Song (*Act Two*).

Pockface Liu acts as a matchmaker for Lin and Chen (*Act Two*).

Little Pockface Liu, Little Soothsayer Tang and Ding Bao discussing their plan for a "thief" (*Act Three*).

Qin Zhongyi, Wang Lifa and Fourth Elder Chang reminisce about their misfortunes (*Act Three*).

The three old men scattering funeral money (*Act Three*).

You asked me for help, and I got you a good deal. I also found your daughter a place where she can fill her belly. Isn't that enough?

SIXTH-BORN KANG: Just who's she being sold to?

POCKFACE LIU: You'll be delighted when I tell you — he's a palace official.

SIXTH-BORN KANG: What kind of palace official would want a peasant girl?

POCKFACE LIU: So then, isn't your daughter lucky?

SIXTH-BORN KANG: But who is he?

POCKFACE LIU: The Head Eunuch, Pang. Surely you've heard of him. Waits on the Empress Dowager — he's a tremendously popular man. Even his vinegar bottles are made of agate.

SIXTH-BORN KANG: How could I face my daughter if I sold her to be a eunuch's wife?

POCKFACE LIU: Whoever you sell her to, you won't be able to face her again, will you? You're a fool. Look, in his house she'll be eating the finest delicacies and wearing the best brocades. Isn't that good fortune? Well, make up your mind — let's get it over with.

SIXTH-BORN KANG: Has there ever been, from earliest times.... He'll only give ten taels?

POCKFACE LIU: There aren't ten taels of silver to be found in your whole village. In the countryside you can buy a child for five catties of wheat flour. Don't tell me you don't know that.

SIXTH-BORN KANG: I...ah!...I've got to talk it over with my daughter.

POCKFACE LIU: I'm telling you, this is your only chance. If you miss it, don't blame me. Hurry up.

SIXTH-BORN KANG: Ai! I'll be back as soon as I can.

POCKFACE LIU: I'll wait for you here.

(*Exit Sixth-Born Kang slowly.*)

POCKFACE LIU (*moving over to Second Elder Song and Fourth Elder Chang*): Those country bumpkins are a pain in the neck; they can never make up their minds.

SECOND ELDER SONG: I expect you're making a bit on this deal?

POCKFACE LIU: Not all that much. But if it goes through I'll make a silver ingot.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: What's going on in the countryside, that people are driven to selling their children?

POCKFACE LIU: Who knows? But the way things are, even a dog would prefer to be born in Beijing.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Elder Liu, you must really be ruthless to make your living at this trade.

POCKFACE LIU: If it wasn't for me maybe they wouldn't find buyers. (*Abruptly changes the subject.*) Second Elder Song (*taking out a small pocket watch*), how do you like this?

SECOND ELDER SONG (*taking the watch*): What a handsome little watch!

POCKFACE LIU: Hear how nicely it ticks?

SECOND ELDER SONG (*listening*): How much do you want for it?

POCKFACE LIU: You like it? Then take it. Five taels of silver — simple as that. If you get tired of it, you can return it for the same amount. It's top quality, the kind of thing you'd like to keep in the family.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: What I'm trying to figure out is why we all have so many foreign things. Old Liu, look at yourself; a foreign snuff bottle, a foreign watch, a gown of foreign satin, and a jacket and trousers of foreign cotton. . . .

POCKFACE LIU: But foreign things are real classy. If I dressed in local cloth like a country bumpkin, no one would take any note of me.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: I always think that our own satin and Sichuan silk are much finer.

POCKFACE LIU: Second Elder Song, you'd better hang onto that watch. In these times, a good foreign watch like that can make people look up to you. Right? What do you say?

SECOND ELDER SONG (*impressed with the watch, but thinking it's too expensive*): I . . . uh. . . .

POCKFACE LIU: Keep it a few days. Pay me later.

(*Fatso Huang enters.*)

FATSO HUANG (*suffering badly from trachoma, he has poor eyesight. Greeting everybody in the teahouse as soon as he enters*): Brothers, look at me. I'm paying my respects to you. We're all one big family — don't do anything to upset our friendship.

WANG LIFA: Your friends aren't here; they're in the inner courtyard.

FATSO HUANG: Ah, yes, my eyes are rather poor. Proprietor, get minced pork noodles ready. As long as Fatso Huang is here there won't be any fighting. (*Moves towards courtyard.*)

ERDEZI (*coming out to greet him*): The two sides are already together. Please hurry.

(*Erdezi and Fatso Huang go into courtyard.*)

(*The waiters repeatedly carry kettles of hot water to the courtyard. Old Man selling toothpicks, beardcombs, earpicks, and other such items enters. Head bent, he moves slowly from customer to customer, but nobody buys anything from him. He is about to go into the inner courtyard, but is stopped by Third-Born Li.*)

THIRD-BORN LI: Hey, grandpa, you'd better try somewhere else. They're settling a dispute in there — they're not interested in your things. (*Hands Old Man a leftover bowl of tea in passing.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG (*whispering*): Third-Born Li. (*Points to courtyard.*) What exactly has got them so riled up?

THIRD-BORN LI (*whispering*): It's over a pigeon, they say. Someone's pigeon flew into someone else's house, and they refused to return it. . . . Ai! The less we say the better. (*To Old Man.*) Grandpa, you must be well on in years.

OLD MAN (*drinking tea*): Thanks very much. I'm eighty-two, but I have no one to look after me. These days it seems like a pigeon is better off than a man. Ai! (*Exits slowly.*)

(*Qin Zhongyi enters, impeccably dressed and looking very pleased with himself.*)

WANG LIFA: Aiyo! How can you spare the time to drop in on us like this? — and without even a servant.

QIN ZHONGYI: Just checking — checking to see if a young fellow like yourself can run a place like this.

WANG LIFA: Ai! I've had to learn because I depend on this place for a living. Since my father died young, I have no choice. Luckily, the regular customers are all old friends of my father; they're prepared to overlook my mistakes. When you're in business to make a living it's very important to be well-liked. I do things just like my father did. If I'm not dropping to my knee, in greeting, I'm dropping compliments — trying to please everybody. That way you avoid trouble. Please sit down. I'll make you a bowl of the very best.

QIN ZHONGYI: I didn't come here to drink tea, and I don't want to sit down.

WANG LIFA: Please stay a while. It's an honour to have you here.

QIN ZHONGYI: Well, okay. (*Sits.*) But you'll get nothing by playing up to me.

WANG LIFA: Third-Born Li, a bowl of our finest. Second Elder, I hope your family are all in good health. Is business going well?

QIN ZHONGYI: Not as well as it might.

WANG LIFA: With the amount of business you do, what could you have to worry about? Everything I have put together doesn't compare to your little finger.

SOOTHSAYER TANG (*coming over*): This gentleman has an auspicious face. Truly a full forehead and a strong jaw. I don't see the lineaments of a prime minister, but there's a wealthy merchant there.

QIN ZHONGYI: Leave me alone. Get out!

WANG LIFA: Mr. Tang, you've had your tea — go and find something else to do. (*Gently pushes him away.*)

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Ai! (*Exits dejectedly.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: Little Wang, don't you agree it's time that the rent on this place was increased? The pittance that your father gave me is no longer enough to keep me in tea.

WANG LIFA: Second Elder, you're right — quite right. But there's no need for you to trouble yourself over such petty things. Send one of your clerks to talk it over with me, and of course I'll pay whatever we agree on. Of course I'll pay it.

QIN ZHONGYI: You little rascal, you're slipperier than your father. Humph! You'll see. Sooner or later I'm going to repossess this place.

WANG LIFA: Don't scare me like that. I know you're concerned about me and want to look after me. I know you would never drive me out to peddle hot tea in the streets.

QIN ZHONGYI: You just wait and see.

(*Peasant Woman enters with ten-year-old Little Girl. The girl has straw stuck in her hair, indicating that she is for sale. At first, Third-Born Li is not going to let them in, but he feels sorry for them and relents. The two of them come in very hesitantly. The laughter and talking suddenly stop as the customers turn to look at them.*)

LITTLE GIRL (*stopping in the middle of the stage*): Momma, I'm hungry. I'm hungry.

(*The woman stares at the girl. Suddenly her legs weaken and she sinks to the floor, sobbing into her hands.*)

QIN ZHONGYI (*to Wang Lifa*): Throw them out.

WANG LIFA: Right. Out you go. You can't stay here.

PEASANT WOMAN: Is there a kind man among you? This child for two taels of silver.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Third-Born Li, take them outside and give them two bowls of noodles with minced pork.

THIRD-BORN LI: Right! (*Goes over to Peasant Woman.*) Come on, wait by the entrance and I'll bring you some noodles.

PEASANT WOMAN (*stands up and moves off, wiping away her tears, seemingly having forgotten her child. But after a few steps she turns and, coming back, draws the girl to her, kissing her*): My darling. My darling.

WANG LIFA: Come on, come on.

(*Peasant Woman and Little Girl go off. Third-Born Li follows a moment later with two bowls of noodles.*)

WANG LIFA (*coming over*): Fourth Elder Chang, it's very good of you to buy them noodles. But, you know, there are thousands like them, thousands — and nobody can do anything about it. (*To Qin Zhongyi.*) Second Elder, what do you think? Don't you agree?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*to Second Elder Song*): Second Elder, what I think is that our Great Qing Empire is about done for.

QIN ZHONGYI (*in a superior tone*): Whether it's done for or not has nothing to do with someone buying a few bowls of noodles for the poor. Little Wang, to be quite honest, I'm seriously thinking about repossessing this place.

WANG LIFA: But you can't do that, Second Elder!

QIN ZHONGYI: Not only am I going to repossess my buildings, I'm going to sell off my farmland and my establishments in the city as well.

WANG LIFA: But why?

QIN ZHONGYI: To consolidate my capital and start a factory.

WANG LIFA: Start a factory?

QIN ZHONGYI: Mmm! A huge, a really huge, factory. That's the only way we'll save the poor, the only way we'll keep out foreign goods, and it's the only way to save the Empire. (*Speaks to Wang Lifa, but is looking at Fourth Elder Chang.*) Ai! What's the point of telling you? You wouldn't understand.

WANG LIFA: You're going to let go of all your property, for the sake of society, with no concern for yourself?

QIN ZHONGYI: You don't understand. It's the only way to strengthen our nation. Oh, forget it. It's time I left. I've seen for myself — you're doing okay here. Don't give me any more of your tripe about not raising the rent.

WANG LIFA: Hang on, I'll call a mulecart for you.

QIN ZHONGYI: Don't bother. I prefer to walk. (*Exit Qin*

Zhongyi, with Wang Lifa seeing him out.)

(*Little Ox enters supporting Eunuch Pang. Little Ox is carrying a water pipe.*)

EUNUCH PANG: Why, Second Elder Qin.

QIN ZHONGYI: Master Pang! I expect you've been feeling a bit easier the last few days, eh?

EUNUCH PANG: That should go without saying. Order has been restored. The Imperial Edict has come down: Tan Sitong* has been given the death sentence. I tell you, anyone who takes it into his head to change the statutes laid down by our ancestors is going to lose his head.

QIN ZHONGYI: I'm quite aware of that.

(*The teahouse customers are suddenly silent, holding their breath as they listen.*)

EUNUCH PANG: You're a clever one, Second Elder. How else could you have become so wealthy, eh?

QIN ZHONGYI: The little property I have isn't worth mentioning.

EUNUCH PANG: You're a trifle modest, perhaps? Why, the whole of Beijing knows Second Elder Qin. You're more formidable than the officials themselves. I've heard, by the way, that many of the wealthy support the Reform Movement.

QIN ZHONGYI: Not so, not so. What little prestige I have pales in your presence. (*Laughs heartily.*)

EUNUCH PANG: Nicely said. Like the Eight Immortals crossing the sea, we each have our own strengths, eh? (*Laughs heartily.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: I must pay you a visit one of these days. Goodbye. (*Exits.*)

EUNUCH PANG (*to himself*): Humph! When an upstart like that dares to cross words with me, I guess times are really changing. (*To Wang Lifa.*) Is Pockface Liu here?

WANG LIFA: Your Excellency, please make yourself at home.

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* One of the leaders of the 1898 Reform Movement.

(*Pockface Liu had seen Eunuch Pang come in, but did not come over for fear of disrupting his conversation with Qin Zhongyi.*)

POCKFACE LIU: Ho! My Old Master. May Heaven bestow fortune on you! I've been waiting for you all the morning. (*Guides Eunuch Pang to a table.*)

(*Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi come over to pay their respects; Eunuch Pang whispers something to them.*)

(*The other customers, after a moment's silence, become talkative again.*)

FIRST CUSTOMER: Who's Tan Sitong?

SECOND CUSTOMER: The name rings a bell. Anyway, he must have committed a major crime. Why else would he be sentenced to death?

THIRD CUSTOMER: Over the past few months some of the officials and students have been making a lot of trouble. How can we possibly know what mischief they are up to!

FOURTH CUSTOMER: So what! My Bannerman's* stipend's secure again. This guy Tan, and that other guy, Kang Youwei** — weren't they advocating cutting off our stipends and making us work for a living? Pretty damn mean.

THIRD CUSTOMER: The bulk of our stipends is creamed off by the top officials anyhow. We have a hard time whichever way you look at it.

FOURTH CUSTOMER: But it's better than losing everything. I'd sooner live in poverty than die in style. There's no way I could survive if I had to make my own living.

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, I don't think it's a good idea to discuss state affairs.

(*The place quietens down, and the customers turn again to their private concerns.*)

EUNUCH PANG (*already seated*): What? Two hundred

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* A Banner was an administrative social and military unit of the Manchus during the Qing Dynasty. "Bannerman" was another name for a Manchu.

** Another reformist leader.

taels of silver for a peasant girl?

POCKFACE LIU (*standing in attendance*): A peasant girl, yes — but she's really handsome. In the city, properly made up and with a bit of training, I guarantee she'll not only be beautiful — she'll be well-mannered as well. I work harder for you than I would for my own father; I haven't left a single thing to chance.

(*Soothsayer Tang returns.*)

WANG LIFA: Soothsayer, why are you here again?

SOOTHSAYER TANG: There are troops and police everywhere. I don't know what's going on.

EUNUCH PANG: They're doubtless looking for Tan Sitong's remnant followers, aren't they? Relax, Soothsayer — nobody's after you.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Thank you, Your Excellency. Now, if you'd just give me a few puffs on that pipe of yours my life would be really rosy.

(*A number of customers seemingly have sensed trouble, and one by one have left the teahouse.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG: It's getting late; perhaps we should go.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Right. Let's go.

(*The two men in grey — Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi — come over.*)

SONG ENZI: Just a moment!

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: What's up?

SONG ENZI: Didn't you just say "the Great Qing Empire is about done for"?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Me? I love our Great Qing Empire; I'm concerned about its survival.

WU XIANGZI (*to Second Elder Song*): You heard him, didn't you? That's what he said, isn't it?

SECOND ELDER SONG: Brothers, we drink tea here every day. Proprietor Wang knows — we're both honest, loyal men.

WU XIANGZI: I asked you if you heard what he said!

SECOND ELDER SONG: Well, if there's some problem,

let's talk it over. Please sit down.

SONG ENZI: You don't talk and we'll lock you up too. He said "the Great Qing Empire is about done for". He's a follower of Tan Sitong.

SECOND ELDER SONG: I . . . I heard him. . . . What he said was. . . .

SONG ENZI (*to Fourth Elder Chang*): Move!

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Where are we going? I demand an explanation.

SONG ENZI: So you're going to resist arrest as well? Well, I've got "the Law" along with me. (*Takes out a steel chain which he had around his waist.*)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: I tell you, I'm a Manchu Bannerman!

WU XIANGZI: When a Bannerman turns traitor, the crime is one degree more serious. Chain him!

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: There's no need to chain me — I won't run away.

SONG ENZI: You're damn right you won't! (*To Second Elder Song.*) And you're coming along too. If you tell the truth in court we'll let you go.

(*Fatso Huang, with three or four others, emerges from the inner courtyard.*)

FATSO HUANG: Well, that's over, and everything turned out well, so it wasn't a waste of time coming.

SECOND ELDER SONG: Elder Huang! Elder Huang!

FATSO HUANG (*rubbing his eyes*): Who?

SECOND ELDER SONG: It's me. Second-Born Song. Come over and put in a few good words for us.

FATSO HUANG (*seeing who it is*): Yo! Elder Song. Elder Wu. Making an arrest, are you, gentlemen? Carry on.

SECOND ELDER SONG: Elder Huang, help us out. Just a few words on our behalf.

FATSO HUANG: Whatever the police can't handle, I look after, but when they can take care of things, I stay off. (*Addresses the teahouse customers.*) Right?

CUSTOMERS: Right! Right!

(*Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi head for exit with Second Elder Song and Fourth Elder Chang.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG (*to Wang Lifa*): Take care of our bird cages.

WANG LIFA: Don't worry, I'll have them sent home for you.

(*Fourth Elder Chang, Second Elder Song, Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi go off.*)

FATSO HUANG (*after being informed by Soothsayer Tang about Eunuch Pang's presence in the teahouse*): Yo! You here too, Elder Pang? I hear you're taking a wife. My congratulations!

EUNUCH PANG: You'll come to the banquet, won't you?

FATSO HUANG: Thank you for doing me the honour. (*Exits.*)

(*Peasant Woman brings back the empty bowls and puts them on the counter. Little Girl enters.*)

LITTLE GIRL: Momma, I'm still hungry.

WANG LIFA: Ai! Out you go.

PEASANT WOMAN: Come, my baby.

LITTLE GIRL: You're not going to sell me, Momma? Don't sell me, Momma.

PEASANT WOMAN: My baby. (*Crying, leads Little Girl off.*)

(*Sixth-Born Kang returns leading Kang Shunzi. They stand in front of the counter.*)

SIXTH-BORN KANG: My daughter. Shunzi. Your father is not a man, he's a beast. But what else can I do? If we can't find a place that will feed you, you'll starve. And if I can't get hold of a few taels of silver, the landlord will grind me to death. You, ah! Shunzi. There's no other way. Please don't make things difficult.

KANG SHUNZI: I . . . I. . . . (*Unable to speak.*)

POCKFACE LIU (*hurrying over*): Ah, you're back. You agree? Good! Come and meet His Excellency. Kowtow to His Excellency.

KANG SHUNZI: I. . . . (*Faints.*)

SIXTH-BORN KANG (*supporting her*): Shunzi! Shunzi!

POCKFACE LIU: Now what's wrong?

SIXTH-BORN KANG: She's so hungry and distraught, she's fainted. Shunzi! Shunzi!

EUNUCH PANG: I want something living — not a corpse. (*The entire stage is quiet.*)

FIRST CUSTOMER (*playing chess with Second Customer*): Checkmate. You're finished!

(*Curtain*)

Act Two

CHARACTERS: Wang Shufen, Paperboy, Kang Shunzi, Third-Born Li, Fourth Elder Chang, Kang Dali, Wang Lifa, Second Elder Song, Old Lin, Refugees, Song Enzi, Old Chen, Policeman, Wu Xiangzi, Cui Jiufeng, Execution Squad (seven), Teahouse Lodgers (three or so), Army Officer, Soothsayer Tang, Pockface Liu, Soldiers (three or four).

TIME: Over ten years later. Yuan Shikai is dead, and the imperialist-incited warlords have been using their military strength to carve the country into private regimes for themselves. Civil war is endemic. Early summer, in the morning.

PLACE: As Act One.

SCENE: The big teahouses of Beijing have closed their doors one after another. Yutai Teahouse has been the one establishment strong enough to survive, but in order to avoid going under in the stiff competition, both the appearance of the place and the services offered have been changed. In the front part they still sell tea, but the back section has been turned into a public lodging house. Out front, they have only tea, melon seeds, and the like; dishes like "noodles with minced pork" are already a thing of the past. The kitchen has been moved out back, and only serves meals for the lodgers. The chairs and tables have undergone a great "reform" as well; now there are only small tables, with wicker chairs, and pale green cloths on all the tables. The large painting of "The Eight Drunken Immortals" and even the shrine to the God of Wealth are gone, having been replaced by pictures of fashionable women in foreign cigarette advertisements. "Don't discuss

state affairs", however, still stares down from every wall, written in even larger characters. Wang Lifa really knows how to "keep up with the times"; not only has he saved Yutai Teahouse, he has managed to expand it.

(Because the front is being repaired, the teahouse has been closed for a few days, but it is to open the next day. Wang Shufen and Third-Born Li are busy getting the place ready. They move the tables and chairs then move them again, arranging and re-arranging, to be sure that everything is as convenient and attractive as possible.)

(Wang Shufen wears her hair in the bun of the time, but Third-Born Li still has the queue of Manchu times.)

(Two or three students emerge from the rear, greet them, and exit.)

WANG SHUFEN (*noticing that Third-Born Li's queue gets in his way*): Third Elder, our teahouse has put on a new face; shouldn't you cut off your old queue?

THIRD-BORN LI: Reform! Everything's taking on a new face, and the newer the face the more faceless it is.

WANG SHUFEN: That's not fair. Third Elder, just think: the few big teahouses that were left, like Detai at Xi Zhi Men, Guangtai at Bei Xin Qiao, and Tiantai in front of the Drum Tower — I hear that they have all had to close down one after the other. Only Yutai is left. Why? Isn't it because my husband realized that teahouses, like governments, have to reform?

THIRD-BORN LI: Humph! I suppose you'd say that ousting the emperor was a great reform, eh? They reformed this and reformed that, but in the end Yuan Shikai still wanted to make himself emperor. Since his death the country has been a mess; artillery battles one day, the city gates closed the next. Reform? Humph! I'm hanging onto my queue in case they reform the emperor right back onto the throne.

WANG SHUFEN: Don't be so obstinate, Third Elder. When they've reformed our country and created a democratic state called the Republic of China for us, don't we have to

reform too? Isn't it much cleaner and nicer now that we've fixed the place up? And isn't it more dignified to be looking after educated customers? Your insistence on keeping that queue just doesn't fit in at all.

THIRD-BORN LI: Madam, you think my queue doesn't fit in; well, I don't fit in either.

WANG SHUFEN: Yo! You're not happy? What's wrong?

THIRD-BORN LI: Can't you see? A teahouse in front and lodgings behind, and only the proprietor and I to look after them. There's no way we can handle it.

WANG SHUFEN: The front is his affair; but don't you have me to help you with the lodgings?

THIRD-BORN LI: Even with your help — cleaning twenty or so rooms, feeding twenty or so lodgers ... making tea, pouring water, doing the shopping, and delivering letters on top of that — just ask yourself: Isn't it too much?

WANG SHUFEN: I agree, Third Elder, but in these hectic times we should be thankful to have a job at all. We've all got to practise a little forbearance.

THIRD-BORN LI: But I can't take it! I get four or five hours' sleep a night. Nobody's made out of iron.

WANG SHUFEN: Ai! Third Elder, nobody has it good these days. Be patient, our oldest boy is finishing primary school this summer, and our second boy isn't far behind. When they can give us a hand, we'll have a bit of time to ourselves. You've been helping us out here since before my father-in-law died. Our old friend. Our faithful old waiter.

(*Wang Lifa enters from rear, somewhat arrogant in air.*)

THIRD-BORN LI: Faithful old waiter? It's been over twenty years, but have you given me one raise? Everything else has been "reformed", why not my wages as well?

WANG LIFA: Yo! What kind of nonsense is that? If business had improved, wouldn't you have got a raise? Enough! We're opening tomorrow. For good luck, let's not have any arguments. All agreed? Okay?

THIRD-BORN LI: All agreed? If the reforms don't include me, I won't work.

(*Voice offstage: "Third-Born Li! Third-Born Li!"*)

WANG LIFA: Mr. Cui is calling you. Get going. We'll talk this over again when we have more time.

THIRD-BORN LI: Humph!

WANG SHUFEN: Wait! Yesterday the city gates were closed, and we don't know that they won't be closed again today. Third Elder, you'd better let the proprietor look after things here while you fetch some groceries. Whatever else you get, be sure to get plenty of salted vegetables.

(*Voice offstage again: "Third-Born Li! Third-Born Li!"*)

THIRD-BORN LI: Right. Called for out back, ordered around out front. Why don't you cut me in two and have done with it? (*Exits angrily.*)

WANG LIFA: Wife, he's getting a bit old, you're going to have to. . . .

WANG SHUFEN: He's been angry all morning, but why shouldn't he be? I couldn't speak honestly with him, but with you I must. We've got to get more help.

WANG LIFA: More help means more wages, and where would that come from? If I had a chance to get out of this business and didn't, I'd be a bloody fool.

(*Muffled sound of cannons in the distance.*)

WANG LIFA: Did you hear that — son-of-a-bitchin' guns again! All your bloody racket. It'll be a miracle if this place opens tomorrow. What a mess!

WANG SHUFEN: If you're so clever, why don't you talk some sense? What have I got to do with the gunfire?

WANG LIFA: Just stop your blathering and get back to work. Hei!

WANG SHUFEN: If we don't work ourselves to death, the guns'll get us. That's not blather, that's the truth. (*Moves slowly to the rear.*)

WANG LIFA (*softening a little*): Wife, don't be afraid. How many rounds have they fired already — and they haven't got us yet. Beijing is on blessed ground.

WANG SHUFEN: My heart, it's always in my throat. Blessed ground, indeed! I've got to give Third Elder some

grocery money. (*Exits.*)

(*A group of beggars — men and women — appear at the door asking for handouts.*)

REFUGEES: Proprietor, you're a good man. Show mercy, show mercy!

WANG LIFA: Move on. We can't give you anything today. We haven't opened for business yet.

REFUGEES: Show mercy, show mercy! We've lost everything.

WANG LIFA: You're wasting your time. I don't have enough to keep myself.

(*Policeman enters.*)

POLICEMAN: Get out of here. Move! Get a move on.

(*Refugees disperse.*)

WANG LIFA: What's happening, Sixth Elder? Is the fighting serious?

POLICEMAN: Serious. Very serious. Where would all these refugees come from if it wasn't serious? You've been ordered to provide eighty catties of hardtack by noon today. The garrison troops can't go out to fight until they have some dry provisions, eh?

WANG LIFA: Listen, you're a wise man. The only cooking we do here is for the lodgers; we don't run a restaurant any more, and we haven't even re-opened for business yet. How can we give them one catty of hardtack, let alone eighty, eh?

POLICEMAN: You have your excuses, but I have my orders. Think it over and see what you can do. (*Makes to leave.*)

WANG LIFA: Take it easy. You know that we really haven't opened yet. When we do we'll be troubling you a lot. How's this — get yourself some good tea. (*Gives him money.*) You get us out of this and we won't forget it.

POLICEMAN (*taking money*): I'll see what I can do, but I can't promise you anything.

(*Three or four soldiers in tattered uniforms, carrying rifles, barge through the entrance.*)

POLICEMAN: Officers, I've just checked the license here;

they're not open for business yet.

FIRST SOLDIER: Fuck you!

POLICEMAN: Proprietor Wang, why don't you show your respect for these officers with a bit of tea money. Perhaps they'll find somewhere else to quench their thirst.

WANG LIFA: Listen officers, I'm really sorry, but we haven't opened for business yet; otherwise, you'd be more than welcome. (*Passes money to Policeman.*)

POLICEMAN (*passes money to the soldiers*): There you are now, officers; you must forgive him, it's really impossible for him to serve you.

SECOND SOLDIER: Fuck this! Paper money? We want the silver stuff!

WANG LIFA: Officers, where would I find silver dollars?

THIRD SOLDIER: Fuck! Thump the bastard!

POLICEMAN: Quick! More money!

WANG LIFA (*digging through his clothes*): Officers, this is all I have. I swear it. (*Offers money.*)

SOLDIERS: Fuck it! (*Accept money, steal two tablecloths as they exit.*)

POLICEMAN: Boy! It's a good thing I was here. If they hadn't left, it would have been the end of you — there wouldn't even have been a teabowl left.

WANG LIFA: I'll never forget you for this kindness.

POLICEMAN: Perhaps you could give me some more concrete remembrance for my kindness?

WANG LIFA: Of course. You're quite right. How stupid of me... but I really don't have a penny left — you can search me if you like. (*Opens jacket to let him search.*) Go ahead, search me.

POLICEMAN: I'm not going to argue with you, but I'll see you tomorrow. Who knows how the winds will be blowing then? (*Exits.*)

WANG LIFA: Take care. (*When he sees that Policeman is gone, he stamps his foot angrily.*) Son-of-a-bitch! War, war. Every day more bloody fighting. Always fighting — but what the hell for?

(*Soothsayer Tang enters, as thin and dirty as ever, but he is wearing a lined silk gown.*)

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, I've come to wish you the best.

WANG LIFA (*still angry*): Yo! Elder Tang? There'll be no more free tea here. (*Surveying Tang's appearance, he begins to smile.*) Say, you must be doing pretty well. Dressed in silk no less.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: A little better off than before. I'm really grateful for these times.

WANG LIFA: Grateful for these times? That doesn't seem to ring true!

SOOTHSAYER TANG: The more uncertain the times, the better my business. These days life and death are a toss-up, so of course scads of people want their fortunes told, their features read. Makes sense, eh?

WANG LIFA: Yes, I suppose it does.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: I hear you've turned the back into lodgings; how about renting me a room?

WANG LIFA: Elder Tang, there's that old weakness of yours. I'm afraid we. . . .

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Oh, I've given up opium.

WANG LIFA: Really? Say, you must really want to get ahead.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Actually, I've switched to heroin. (*Points to the cigarette advertisement on the wall.*) Look. "Hademen Cigarettes — for length and an easy draw." (*Takes out cigarette to demonstrate.*) Deftly remove a little tobacco, and you've got a perfect place to put the heroin. British Imperial Cigarettes and Japanese heroin — I'm being looked after by the big boys. Now, wouldn't you call that good fortune?

WANG LIFA: Good fortune, indeed. Indeed. But the rooms are all taken. Whenever one comes vacant, though, I'll keep it for you.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: You . . . you have no respect. You're afraid I won't pay the rent.

WANG LIFA: Not so at all. We all grew up in the streets; how can anyone look down on anyone else? See, I'm being perfectly frank like an old friend!

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Your tongue is even smoother than my own.

WANG LIFA: I'm not sweet-talking you, I'm quite sincere. Over the past years how many free bowls of tea have you got out of me? Think about it. And now that you're doing okay, have you given any thought to repaying me?

SOOTHSAYER TANG: I'll square up with you pretty soon. It's only a matter of a few coins anyway. (*With these words to cover his embarrassment, turns to leave.*)

(*Paperboy on the street outside cries, "Latest news on the battle at Changxindian. Read all about it — latest battle at Changxindian!" Paperboy sticks his head in entrance.*)

PAPERBOY: Proprietor, would you like a copy? Latest news on the fighting at Changxindian.

WANG LIFA: Any news about somewhere they're not fighting?

PAPERBOY: Could be — look for yourself.

WANG LIFA: Off you go! I'm not interested.

PAPERBOY: Proprietor, whether you read it or not, the fighting still goes on. (*To Soothsayer Tang.*) Sir, would you like a copy?

SOOTHSAYER TANG: I'm not like him. (*Points to Wang Lifa.*) I'm most concerned about state affairs. (*Takes a copy of the paper, but leaves without paying.*)

(*Paperboy chases off after him.*)

WANG LIFA (*to himself*): Changxindian! Changxindian! That's right on our doorstep. (*Shouts.*) Third Elder! Third Elder! You'd better go for groceries right away. If we waste time the city gates will be closed for sure, and there'll be nothing in the markets. Hei! (*When no one answers, strides angrily to the back.*)

(*Fourth Elder Chang enters carrying two chickens and a bunch of pickled turnips.*)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Proprietor Wang.

WANG LIFA: Who? Yo! Fourth Elder! What are you up to these days?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Selling vegetables. Earning my own living, and I mean "earning" it. But the city outskirts are in an uproar today; impossible to buy any vegetables. I ran around everywhere and finally managed to get these two chickens and a few catties of pickled turnips. I heard that you're opening again tomorrow; I got them for you specially, because I thought you might need them.

WANG LIFA: Thanks very much. You've saved the day.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*viewing the premises*): Very nice. Very nice. Say, you've really fixed the place up. All the other big teahouses have folded. You're the only one who's managed to turn all the reforms and changes to good account.

WANG LIFA: No need to get carried away. I've done what I could, but I'm afraid our country's gone to the dogs.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: My goodness, your place is so nice now, I'm afraid the likes of me won't be able to afford to come here.

(*Second Elder Song enters. He is very shabbily dressed, but still carries a bird cage.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG: Proprietor Wang, I hear you're re-opening tomorrow. I've come to wish you well. (*Sees Fourth Elder Chang.*) Aiyo! Fourth Elder, what a pleasant surprise.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Second Elder. My, my! How are you?

WANG LIFA: Why don't you both sit down?

SECOND ELDER SONG: Proprietor Wang, how are you? And the good woman? And your sons? How's the business going?

WANG LIFA (*in answer to all this*): All fine, thanks to old customers like you. (*Picks up the chickens and the pickled turnips.*) Fourth Elder, what do I owe you?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: It's up to you. Whatever you think they're worth.

WANG LIFA: Fine. But let me bring you some tea. (*Takes things to the rear.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG: Fourth Elder, you . . . how are you getting along?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: I'm peddling fresh vegetables. When your stipend is cut off you have to earn your own keep, eh? And how about yourself, Second Elder?

SECOND ELDER SONG: How am I? It's hard to keep from crying. Have you noticed the things I'm wearing? They're a disgrace!

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: But you can read and write, and work figures; surely you can find some sort of job?

SECOND ELDER SONG: Of course nobody wants to starve to death doing nothing, but who wants us Manchu Bannermen? When you think about it, maybe the Great Qing Empire wasn't so good, but I've gone hungry from the day this Republic of China began.

WANG LIFA (*returning with tea and giving money to Fourth Elder Chang*): I don't know how much you spent. Perhaps this isn't enough?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*taking money and stuffing it in his jacket without counting it*): Forget it.

WANG LIFA: Second Elder (*pointing to bird cage*), still an oriole, I suppose? Good singer?

SECOND ELDER SONG: Of course it's an oriole. I may be going hungry, but I'd never let my oriole starve. (*Perks up a bit.*) Take a look at him — come on. (*Opens cover.*) Isn't he a beauty? Whenever I look at him, I can't bear the thought of dying.

WANG LIFA: Second Elder Song, no more talk of dying! Your luck will change one of these days.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Come on, Second Elder, let's find a place where we can share a few cups of wine. One cup can drown a thousand sorrows. Proprietor Wang, I'm sorry; I'd like to invite you, but I don't have enough money.

WANG LIFA: I can't spare the time anyway. You two go without me.

(*As Fourth Elder Chang and Second Elder Song are on their way out, Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi enter. They still wear grey gowns, but the cuffs are in the new narrow fashion, and they are wearing black mandarin jackets on top of them.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG (*recognizing them and automatically going down on one knee to pay his respects*): Well. So it's you two gentlemen.

(*As if influenced by Second Elder Song, Wang Lifa greets them in the same way, leaving the two nonplussed.*)

SONG ENZI: What's this? We've got a Republic now, how come you still kneel? Haven't you learned the new bow?

SECOND ELDER SONG: Whenever I see you two gentlemen's grey gowns, I think of that time back under the Qing, and I drop to my knee without thinking.

WANG LIFA: Same here. The old form of greeting suits me better than the new bow.

WU XIANGZI (*laughing*): Second Elder Song, you Bannermen's stipends have dried up, but our "Grey Gown Department" is flourishing better than ever. (*Laughs, notices Fourth Elder Chang.*) Isn't this Fourth Elder Chang?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: It is. Your eyesight's fine. I was arrested by you gentlemen here in 1898, and spent more than a year in prison for saying that "the Great Qing Empire is about done for".

SONG ENZI: You have a remarkable memory. Life treating you well these days?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Thanks to you, yes. I got out of prison just before the year 1900, and joined the Boxers to help the dynasty oust the foreigners. We did battle with the foreigners a few times; but despite all our efforts the Great Qing Empire collapsed in the end. Well, it deserved to collapse. I'm a Bannerman myself, but I must speak the truth. Now, every day I'm up at dawn and get together two baskets of vegetables, and by mid-morning I have them all sold. Because I earn my own keep I'm healthier than ever. If the foreigners ever venture to attack again, I'll be ready for them. I'm

a Bannerman. Bannermen are Chinese too! And how've you two been keeping?

WU XIANGZI: We muddle along. When there was an emperor, we served the emperor; when Yuan Shikai became president, we served President Yuan Shikai. And now . . . Song Enzi, how would you put it?

SONG ENZI: Now we serve whoever puts food in our bellies.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: And supposing a foreigner offers to feed you?

SECOND ELDER SONG: Fourth Elder, we'd better go.

WU XIANGZI: You listen to me, Fourth Elder Chang, whoever we work for — they all depend on foreign backing. Without foreign rifles and foreign cannons how could there be any fighting?

SECOND ELDER SONG: Quite right, indeed. Fourth Elder, let's go.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Till we meet again, gentlemen. I expect you'll both be wealthy officials before too long. (*Exits with Second Elder Song.*)

SONG ENZI: That bastard!

WANG LIFA (*pouring tea*): Fourth Elder Chang is always difficult. Pay no attention to him. (*Offers them tea.*) You should try some, it's freshly brewed.

SONG ENZI: Who do you have lodging back there?

WANG LIFA: Mostly university students, and a few friends as well. I keep a register and report to Police Headquarters from time to time. Shall I get it for you?

WU XIANGZI: We don't watch registers, we watch people.

WANG LIFA: You don't need to watch anyone here, I guarantee they're all solid citizens.

SONG ENZI: Just why do you like renting to students, eh? Students aren't such a reliable lot.

WANG LIFA: Nowadays officials are appointed one day and dismissed the next. Merchants open shop today and tomorrow they're broke. You can't depend on them. It's only the students who have money to pay rent each month; if they

didn't have money they wouldn't be in university. Think about it. Makes sense, doesn't it?

SONG ENZI: To the last detail. You're dead right. We haven't been paid lately ourselves.

WU XIANGZI: That's right. So we have to nab somebody every day just to keep in pocket money.

SONG ENZI: We're not too fussy about who we nab, but we are about who we let go. Making arrests is what keeps us in pocket money. Come on, let's take a look out back.

WU XIANGZI: After you.

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, gentlemen, don't trouble yourselves. I assure you, nobody here's broken the law.

SONG ENZI: But if we don't look, we can't nab anybody. And if we don't what do we do for cash?

WU XIANGZI: If Proprietor Wang doesn't want us to look, he'll surely be able to think of something else for us. We've got to give Proprietor Wang a chance to save face. Right, Proprietor Wang?

WANG LIFA: I. . . .

SONG ENZI: It's not too bright, but I've got an idea: how about a simple monthly reckoning? On the first of every month — by the Western calendar — you can send us this little. . . .

WU XIANGZI: Little expression of gratitude.

SONG ENZI: Right. Just a little expression of gratitude. Save you time, and save us time.

WANG LIFA: This little expression of gratitude — how much will it come to?

WU XIANGZI: We're old friends; do as you see fit. You understand these things — you wouldn't want to turn an expression of gratitude into ingratitude, would you?

THIRD-BORN LI (*appearing from rear with shopping basket*): Oh! Gentlemen. (*Drops to one knee.*) I'm afraid the city gates will be closed again today. (*Starts off without waiting for a reply.*)

(*Two or three students rush in.*)

STUDENTS: Third Elder, you'd better not go out there . . .

they're seizing men for the army. (*Continue to rear.*)

THIRD-BORN LI (*continuing out*): So what if the army seizes me? You're worked to death wherever you are. (*Pockface Liu runs in, frightened out of his wits, and bumps squarely into Third-Born Li.*)

THIRD-BORN LI: What's wrong, you look like you've seen a ghost.

POCKFACE LIU (*trying to catch his breath*): Don't . . . don't . . . don't go out. They almost got me.

WANG LIFA: Third Elder, you'd better wait a while.

THIRD-BORN LI: But what'll we do about lunch?

WANG LIFA: You'll just have to explain to them that pickled turnips and rice were all we could get for lunch. They can have the two chickens for dinner tonight.

THIRD-BORN LI: Okay. (*Returns.*)

POCKFACE LIU: Son-of-a-bitch! They about scared me to death.

SONG ENZI: Alive, about all you're good for is buying and selling a few more girls.

POCKFACE LIU: Some people want to sell them, some want to buy them; I'm just a middleman. I do what I can to help — what's wrong with that? (*Gulps down the three cups of tea on the table.*)

WU XIANGZI: I'm warning you, since the end of the Qing, we've been busy arresting rebels. We don't like to waste our time on stinking slavetraders and kidnappers, but if you choose to carry on your game right in front of our noses we won't let it go like we used to. And when we turn in your sort, we make damn sure they lock you onto the shitpail.

POCKFACE LIU: Gentlemen, how can you talk like that? I'm living on the edge of starvation myself. Just think, I used to hobnob with the Banner aristocracy and the palace eunuchs. All this so-called revolution has brought me is hardship. Now, any high-ups looking for concubines insist on getting some actress who can sing local drama, or some star from a Beijing Opera troupe — and they're willing to pay from three to five thousand silver dollars. I'd love to get in

on that, but . . . fat chance. The piddling bit of business I do is nothing.

SONG ENZI: You scum. Locked on the shitpail is the only place for your kind.

POCKFACE LIU: Back off, eh. I don't have anything to give you gentlemen today, but I will have one of these days soon.

WU XIANGZI: You've got some deal going today; otherwise, you wouldn't show your face when there's trouble on the streets.

POCKFACE LIU: No, I haven't. Nothing.

SONG ENZI: That mouth of yours has never spoken a single word of truth. But lying to us will do you no good. Proprietor Wang, we're going to make our rounds. The first of next month — Western calendar — don't forget!

WANG LIFA: I'd forget my own name before I'd forget the gratitude I owe you gentlemen.

WU XIANGZI: Then it's settled. (*Exits with Song Enzi.*)

WANG LIFA: Elder Liu, I think you've had enough tea; why don't you find somewhere else to hang out?

POCKFACE LIU: Why don't you get on with your work? I'm waiting here for a couple of friends.

WANG LIFA: Let you and I get things straight. From now on you're going to have to do your business somewhere else. This place has been reformed — it's a high-class establishment now.

(*Kang Shunzi, carrying a small bundle and leading Kang Dali, peers in through the door.*)

KANG DALI: Is this the place?

KANG SHUNZI: This is it all right, but it seems different. (*Enters, makes a more careful survey, and sees Pockface Liu.*) Dali, come in . . . this is it.

KANG DALI: Are you sure, Momma?

KANG SHUNZI: No doubt about it. With that guy here, there can be no mistake.

WANG LIFA: Who're you looking for?

KANG SHUNZI (*without answering and striding over to Pockface Liu*): Pockface Liu, do you know who you're look-

ing at? (*Wants to strike him, but seems unable to — shudders violently.*) You . . . you . . . you. . . . (*Wants to curse him, but is overcome with emotion.*)

POCKFACE LIU: What're you bugging me for, you dumb broad? What have I done to you?

KANG SHUNZI (*struggling with him*): Done to me! You . . . you don't remember who I am? What kind of a man would turn to your rotten, stinking business to fill his belly? Bastard!

WANG LIFA: Elder Sister, if you've got some problem let's hear it — reasonably.

KANG SHUNZI: You're the proprietor? Have you forgotten? More than ten years ago, when a palace eunuch wanted to buy a wife?

WANG LIFA: You . . . you're the woman Eunuch Pang. . . .

KANG SHUNZI (*pointing at Pockface Liu*): He's to blame for it all. And now he's going to pay. (*Again makes as if to strike him but is still unable to bring herself to do it.*)

POCKFACE LIU (*ducking away*): Back off. Back off. I'm not going to fight with a woman — I'm a man. (*Retreating as he speaks.*) I . . . I'm going to find someone to straighten this out. (*Runs to the rear.*)

WANG LIFA (*to Kang Shunzi*): Elder Sister, sit down and tell me all about it. How's Eunuch Pang?

KANG SHUNZI (*sitting down and catching her breath*): He's dead. His nephews let him starve to death. He was still wealthy when the Republic was established, but he'd lost all his power, and his nephews cheated him out of everything he owned. When he died, they threw us out with nothing — not even a blanket.

WANG LIFA: And this? This is. . . .

KANG SHUNZI: My son.

WANG LIFA: Your . . . ?

KANG SHUNZI: He was bought too, as Eunuch Pang's son.

KANG DALI: Momma, is this really the place where your father sold you?

KANG SHUNZI: That's right, my sweet. I fainted just after I came in. I'll never forget this place.

KANG DALI: But I don't remember where my father sold me.

KANG SHUNZI: That's because you were barely a year old. I brought you up though, and now you're my son, eh, my love?

KANG DALI: That old bully. Pinched you, twisted your arm, even bit you; and he used to burn me with those little sticks he used to prepare his opium. There were too many of them, we couldn't do anything about it. If it wasn't for you, mother, they would have caned me to death.

KANG SHUNZI: Yes, there were lots of them all right, but we let them walk all over us. Take Pockface Liu here, I should bite him, draw blood, but I haven't touched him. I couldn't even belt him one.

KANG DALI: Momma, when I grow up I'll help you fight. I don't know who my real mother is. You're my mother now.

KANG SHUNZI: That's a good boy. That's a good boy. We'll always stick together; I'll get some kind of job and you can go to school. (*Stares dreamily for a moment.*) Proprietor, since I was sold in here, our fates seem to be linked together. Perhaps you could help me find a job of some sort? My own life doesn't matter, but this helpless child mustn't be allowed to starve to death.

(*Wang Shufen enters and stands at rear, listening.*)

WANG LIFA: What kind of work can you do?

KANG SHUNZI: Washing, sewing, mending, everyday cooking — anything like that. I'm a peasant woman, I'm used to hard work. Just as long as I don't have to play wife to a eunuch again, anything will seem sweet.

WANG LIFA: How about pay?

KANG SHUNZI: All we want is three meals a day, a place to sleep, and enough to send Dali to school.

WANG LIFA: Fine. I'll start making some enquiries. You know, though it was more than ten years ago, I haven't forgotten that day; it still upsets me to think of it.

KANG SHUNZI: But what are my boy and I going to do in the meantime?

WANG LIFA: Why don't you go to the countryside and try to find your father?

KANG SHUNZI: My father? I don't know whether he's alive or dead. And even if he's alive, I don't want to find him. He sold me into shame; I can't call him "Father" any more.

WANG LIFA: It's not going to be easy to find you a job right away.

WANG SHUFEN (*coming over*): If she can do everything and doesn't want too much money, I want to keep her here!

WANG LIFA: You?

WANG SHUFEN: Don't I run half the teahouse? Should Third Elder Li and I work ourselves to death?

KANG SHUNZI: Proprietor, give me a chance. If I'm not good enough, you just say the word and I'll leave.

WANG SHUFEN: Elder Sister, come with me.

KANG SHUNZI: This is the place I was sold, but now I can make it my new home. Dali, come along.

KANG DALI: Proprietor, if you don't beat me, I'll help Momma with her work. (*Exits with Wang Shufen and Kang Shunzi.*)

WANG LIFA: Well! Two more mouths to feed — just like that! You get rid of the eunuchs, but then the eunuchs' families descend on you.

THIRD-BORN LI (*entering with Pockface and shielding him*): Out you go. (*Disappears again.*)

WANG LIFA: Out! Or are you hanging around to get your face slapped a couple of good ones?

POCKFACE LIU: Didn't I tell you? I'm waiting for a couple of friends.

WANG LIFA: You! How many times do I have to tell you before you get the message?

POCKFACE LIU: What else can I do? We just live different sorts of lives. You'll always be running a teahouse, and me, I'll always be working my own little game — always. Till the day I die.

(*Old Lin and Old Chen enter, wreathed in smiles.*)

POCKFACE LIU (*although they are younger than he is, Liu addresses them as elder brothers*): Elder Brother Lin! Elder Brother Chen! (*Noticing Wang's disapproval, he quickly pleads.*) Proprietor Wang, there's nobody here right now. Give me a break — I won't do it again.

WANG LIFA: She's still here, you know. (*Points towards back.*)

POCKFACE LIU: Forget it. She's not going to start anything, and if she does, these fellows'll give me a hand.

WANG LIFA: You . . . ! Humph! (*Exits rear.*)

POCKFACE LIU: Sit down, please. Now, what do you have in mind?

OLD LIN: You tell him, Second Elder.

OLD CHEN: You tell him, Elder Brother.

POCKFACE LIU: What does it matter who tells me?

OLD CHEN: You tell him — you're the elder brother.

OLD LIN: Well . . . you see. . . . The two of us are sworn brothers.

OLD CHEN: Right. Sworn brothers. We're as close as two men in one pair of pants.

OLD LIN: He's got some silver dollars.

POCKFACE LIU: Silver dollars!

OLD CHEN: Elder Brother Lin has some silver dollars too.

POCKFACE LIU: How much altogether? Give me a figure.

OLD LIN: Well, we can't tell you that just yet, eh?

OLD CHEN: If you can do what we want, then we'll tell you.

POCKFACE LIU: When there're silver dollars about, I can do anything.

OLD LIN and OLD CHEN: Really?

POCKFACE LIU: Really. Or I'll be a monkey's uncle.

OLD LIN: Then . . . you tell him, Second Elder.

OLD CHEN: No, you tell him, Elder Brother.

OLD LIN: Well now, you can see that there are two of us, eh?

POCKFACE LIU: Mmmh.

OLD CHEN: As close as two men in one pair of pants?

POCKFACE LIU: Mmmh!

OLD LIN: Nobody'd make fun of our friendship, would they?

POCKFACE LIU: Friendship? Nobody makes fun of friendship.

OLD CHEN: So nobody'd make fun of the friendship between three people either, would they?

POCKFACE LIU: Three people? Who's the third?

OLD LIN: Our bride.

POCKFACE LIU: Mmmh? Mmmh. Mmmh! Now I see. But it's going to be difficult to manage; I've never done it before. Think of it! We're always talking about the weddings of happy twosomes, but who ever heard of a happy threesome?

OLD LIN: Difficult to manage?

POCKFACE LIU: Very difficult to manage.

OLD LIN (*to Old Chen*): Well, what do you think?

OLD CHEN: Maybe we should forget about it?

OLD LIN: Forget about it? No way! After all these years in the army, and we can't manage even half a wife? Son-of-a-bitch!

POCKFACE LIU: If you can't forget about it, then we're going to have to do some more thinking. Just how many silver dollars do you actually have?

(*Wang Lifa and Cui Jiufeng approach slowly from the rear. Pockface Liu and the two deserters stop talking.*)

WANG LIFA: Mr. Cui, if Second Elder Qin sent you an invitation yesterday, why aren't you going? Someone as learned as yourself — everything from astronomy to geography — and a former member of the Legislative Assembly as well. And yet you choose to live here, chanting sutras day after day. Why don't you get involved? A man of your calibre should be in government. Only when we get honest people like you in office will ordinary citizens like us have a chance to live normal lives.

CUI JIUFENG: I'm ashamed of myself, ashamed. To have been a member of this Legislative Assembly is nothing short of a sin. What has the revolution accomplished? We've deluded ourselves and deluded the people — nothing else. Ai!

All I can do now is cultivate myself morally and repent my past sins.

WANG LIFA: But look at Second Elder Qin. Not only is he setting up a factory, he's even opening up private banks.

CUI JIUFENG: Setting up factories and opening banks will accomplish nothing. He mouths the slogan, "Save the nation through industrialization", but who is he really saving? Himself! He's getting wealthier all the time. His industrial venture? Humph! The foreigners can wipe him out with the wave of a hand — then he can wave his factory goodbye forever.

WANG LIFA: Don't talk like that! Surely there's still some hope for us?

CUI JIUFENG: I don't know, I just don't know. With all this fighting . . . one day Marshal Wang's attacking Marshal Li and the next day Marshal Zhao's attacking Marshal Wang. And who's putting them up to it?

WANG LIFA: Yes, who? Who's the son-of-a-bitch?

CUI JIUFENG: The foreigners.

WANG LIFA: Foreigners? I don't see how.

CUI JIUFENG: You will in time. The day is coming when China will collapse and we'll all be enslaved. I was involved in our so-called "revolution" — I know what I'm talking about.

WANG LIFA: Then, why don't you think of something? Do something? To prevent our people becoming slaves?

CUI JIUFENG: When I was young I thought I had to save the nation; truly I did. But now I see things as they are. China is finished — dead.

WANG LIFA: Then we must try to breathe new life into her!

CUI JIUFENG: New life into an old corpse? Nonsense. What's dead is dead. Everything living must die sooner or later. Anyway, I'm going to the Temple of Infinite Mercy. If Second Elder Qin sends someone for me again, tell him that all I do these days is chant sutras, nothing else. (*Exits.*)

(*Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi re-enter.*)

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, have you heard anything?

(*Neither Song Enzi nor Wu Xiangzi answers. They sit near the entrance, watching Pockface Liu and the deserters.*)

(*Pockface Liu, at a loss, looks at the table.*)

(*Old Chen and Old Lin, also at a loss, look at each other without speaking.*)

(*Complete silence for a moment.*)

OLD CHEN: Elder Brother, time to go?

OLD LIN: Yes, let's go.

SONG ENZI: Not so fast. (*Rises and blocks their way.*)

OLD CHEN: What've we done?

WU XIANGZI (*rising*): You're asking what you've done? (*The four of them glare at each other.*)

SONG ENZI: You'd better come quietly.

OLD LIN: Come where?

WU XIANGZI: You're deserters. Right? You've scraped together a few silver dollars, and you want to hole up in Beijing. Right? If you've got money, you hole up; if you haven't, you turn to banditry. Right?

OLD CHEN: It's none of your business. I can handle eight of the likes of you. (*Raises his fists.*)

SONG ENZI: You? I'll bet you've sold your guns. Right? A man without a gun is no match for one with one. Right? (*Pats pistol under his gown.*) I suspect it's me who can handle eight of the likes of you.

OLD LIN: Brothers, there's no need for this. We're all brothers.

WU XIANGZI: Right! So let's sit down and talk. Now, what's your preference — your life, or your silver dollars?

OLD CHEN: That little bit of money was hard come by. We had to fight for whoever would pay us, and God knows how many times we fought.

SONG ENZI: But you know the penalty for desertion, don't you?

OLD LIN: Let's talk it over, eh? Didn't you just agree we're all brothers?

WU XIANGZI: Now you're talking just like one of us — so keep on talking!

WANG LIFA (*at entrance*): Gentlemen, the Execution Squad is coming.

OLD CHEN and OLD LIN: Ah! (*Frightened and uncertain, make to run for the back.*)

SONG ENZI: Stay where you are. You have my word; give us half your silver dollars and we'll look after you. We're your friends.

OLD LIN and OLD CHEN: Okay . . . friends.

(*Execution Squad enters, led by two sword bearers, rifles slung over their shoulders, the swords wrapped in red cloth. In the centre, the insignia bearer carries the execution mandate, and behind him follow four soldiers with red and black clubs. Execution Officer brings up the rear.*)

WU XIANGZI (*standing at attention with Song Enzi, Old Lin, and Old Chen, takes his credentials from his cap, and presents them to Execution Officer*): Officer, we've just been interrogating a deserter.

EXECUTION OFFICER: Him eh? (*Pointing to Pockface Liu.*)

WU XIANGZI (*pointing to Pockface Liu*): That's him.

EXECUTION OFFICER: Seize him!

POCKFACE LIU (*crying out*): Master! Not me! It's not me.

EXECUTION OFFICER: Seize him!

(*Exit Execution Squad with Pockface Liu.*)

WU XIANGZI (*to Song Enzi*): Let's go in and nab a couple of students.

SONG ENZI: Come on.

(*They hurry towards the rear.*)

(*Curtain*)

Act Three

CHARACTERS: Wang Dashuan, Chef Ming, Yu Houzhai, Zhou Xiuhua, Zou Fuyuan, Little Song Enzi, Wang Xiaohua, Wei Fuxi, Little Wu Xiangzi, Kang Shunzi, Sixth-Born Fang, Fourth Elder Chang, Ding Bao, Che Dangdang, Qin Zhongyi, Wang Lifa, Fourth Aunt Pang, Little Xinyan, two Teahouse Customers, Chun Mei, Director Shen, Little Pockface Liu, Old Yang, four Kuomintang Special Police, Lightbill Collector, Little Erdezi, Little Soothsayer Tang, Xie Yongren.

TIME: The period following the defeat of the Japanese when KMT special agents and American troops were running rampant in Beijing. An early morning in autumn.

PLACE: As Act Two.

SCENE: Yutai Teahouse is no longer the handsome place it was in the previous act. The wicker chairs are gone, having been replaced with stools and benches. Everything, from the building itself to the furniture, is dull and shabby. The only thing that might catch the eye at all is the proliferation of "Don't discuss state affairs" notices — now in even bigger characters. Along with them there are some new notices: "Pay in advance."

(It is early in the morning. The shutters have not yet been removed from the windows. Alone, Wang Lifa's son, Wang Dashuan, is disconsolately putting the place in order.)

(Wang Dashuan's wife, Zhou Xiuhua enters from the rear with their daughter, Wang Xiaohua. They are talking as they enter.)

WANG XIAOHUA: Momma, will you make me noodles for lunch? I haven't had any for ages.

ZHOU XIUHUA: I know, dearest, but we may not be able to get flour. And even if the store happens to have some, we might not have enough money. Ai!

WANG XIAOHUA: Maybe we'll be lucky, and there'll be both.

ZHOU XIUHUA: That's a nice thought, but it's not as easy as that. Off to school now, Xiaohua, and watch out for those drunken American jeep drivers.

WANG DASHUAN: Xiaohua, just a minute.

WANG XIAOHUA: What do you want, Poppa?

WANG DASHUAN: Last night. . . .

ZHOU XIUHUA: I've already warned her. She understands.

WANG DASHUAN: You mustn't tell anyone your Uncle Dali was here. If they find out about it, we'll all be killed. Do you understand?

WANG XIAOHUA: They can beat me to death before I'll say a word. If they ask me if Uncle Dali has come back, I'll just tell them we haven't heard a word from him since he left here years ago.

(*Kang Shunzi enters from rear. She stoops a bit, but is still vigorous looking. As she enters, she is calling Wang Xiaohua.*)

KANG SHUNZI: Xiaohua. Xiaohua. Haven't you gone yet?

WANG XIAOHUA: Granny Kang, what is it?

KANG SHUNZI: Xiaohua, my dearest, Granny wants to see you once more. (*Caresses Xiaohua's hair.*) So pretty. But if you got more to eat, you'd be even prettier.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Auntie, you're going to go, are you?

KANG SHUNZI: Yes. I'm going to go. It'll be one less mouth for you to feed. I brought Dali up. How could I refuse him when he wants me to go? Remember? When we first came here, he wasn't even as big as Xiaohua.

WANG XIAOHUA: But Uncle Dali's so brave and strong now.

KANG SHUNZI: Yes, isn't he! Although he was hardly here long enough to smoke a pipeful of tobacco, it made me feel so much younger. I don't have a thing in this world, but when I see him it's as if I have everything. I'm going with him;

hardship and fatigue will seem sweet when I'm with him. Those big hands and strong legs — he's a giant of a man.

WANG XIAOHUA: Granny, I'm going with you too.

KANG SHUNZI: Xiaohua, if you're a good little girl, and go to school, I promise I'll come back and visit you.

WANG DASHUAN: Xiaohua, off you go to school. You don't want to be late, do you?

WANG XIAOHUA: Granny, please don't go till I'm home from school.

KANG SHUNZI: Ai! Ai! You'd better go, dearest. (*Exit Wang Xiaohua.*)

WANG DASHUAN: Auntie, did my father ask you to leave?

KANG SHUNZI: He hasn't decided anything yet. But if people find out that Dali was here, and then I leave all of a sudden, I'm just afraid that you'll be accused. They're arresting people every day now, aren't they? I don't want to do anything that might hurt you people.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Auntie, you've got to look after yourself. Getting out of here means a new chance to live. Aren't our customers always whispering: if you want to live you should go to the Western Hills? That's where the Communist-led Eighth Route Army is.

WANG DASHUAN: That's right.

KANG SHUNZI: Sister Xiuhua, come on, we'd better talk this over again. I can't just look out for myself, when you people might suffer. And you, Dashuan . . . you'd better give it some thought too. (*Exits rear with Zhou Xiuhua.*) (*Ding Bao enters.*)

DING BAO: Hey! Proprietor, I'm here!

WANG DASHUAN: Oh? And who are you?

DING BAO: Little Ding Bao. Little Pockface Liu sent me. He said the old proprietor here asked him to find him a hostess.

WANG DASHUAN: Look around, Miss. What would a rundown teahouse like this do with a hostess? Seems my old man is desperate enough to try any fool thing.

(*Wang Lifa enters slowly. He still looks vigorous, but his clothes are very shabby.*)

WANG LIFA: Elder Son, why do you always talk about me behind my back? Who's desperate enough to try any fool thing? Go and get those shutters down. It's long past opening time.

(*Wang Dashuan goes to remove the window shutters.*)

DING BAO: Old Proprietor, you're in good health?

WANG LIFA: Mmmh. If I sat down to some noodles with meat sauce, I could still tuck away three big bowls or so. Too bad there aren't any. You're still in your teens, Miss?

DING BAO: I'm seventeen.

WANG LIFA: Only seventeen, eh?

DING BAO: That's all. My mother was a widow; she brought me up. When the war was over, the government claimed that the little house father left us was traitor's property, and they took it away. My mother was so upset about it that she died, and now I have to work as a come-on hostess. Old Proprietor, I still don't know what they mean by "traitor's property". Do you?

WANG LIFA: You must be careful what you say, Miss. One wrong word can turn anything into "traitor's property". Take a look back there. Used to be Second Elder Qin's warehouse. He rubbed somebody the wrong way, they said it was traitor's property, and he lost the whole thing. That's what "traitor's property" means.

(*Wang Dashuan enters.*)

DING BAO: You're right, Old Proprietor, I'm traitor's property too. I have to wait on whoever has power and influence. Son-of-a-bitch! I'm only seventeen, but I often wish I was dead. At least my corpse would be my own. But this kind of work — I'm slowly rotting away.

WANG DASHUAN: Poppa, do you really want to hire a hostess?

WANG LIFA: Well, I sort of talked about it with Little Pockface Liu. I've always been for improving things — reform. When I see how bad business is, I get worried.

WANG DASHUAN: You're worried? Well, I'm worried too. But you seem to forget that Yutai Teahouse is a respected old name. Should a respected old business of more than sixty years' standing be using a come-on hostess?

DING BAO: Respected old name? The older something is the more worthless it is. You don't believe me? If I was twenty-eight instead of seventeen, even if you called me "Sweet Little Ding Bao", or "Baby Ding Bao", no one would give me a second glance.

(*Two Customers enter.*)

WANG LIFA: You gentlemen are up early today. Did you bring your own tea? Elder Son, bring a kettle of water. (*Exit Wang Dashuan.*) Gentlemen, I'm very sorry, but you have to pay in advance.

FIRST CUSTOMER: That's unheard of!

WANG LIFA: I'd never heard of it either — in all the years I've run this teahouse. But I'm sure you can understand: tea and coal are constantly going up in price. It's quite possible that even while you're here, tea itself could take another jump. Besides, don't you think it's less trouble to pay in advance?

SECOND CUSTOMER: As far as I'm concerned, it would be less trouble not to have any at all! (*Exits with First Customer.*)

WANG DASHUAN (*entering with kettle*): Huh? They've gone.

WANG LIFA: So now you see why I'm worried.

DING BAO: If I'd gone over and sweet-talked them, "So here you are, you little rascals!" they'd have spent a silver dollar for sure.

WANG LIFA: You, Elder Son — you're stubborn as a mule.

WANG DASHUAN (*putting down kettle*): That does it. I'm going for a walk. I can't stand it in here. (*Exits.*)

WANG LIFA: You can't stand it? Well, I can't stand it either.

(*Little Pockface Liu enters in Western clothes, a briefcase under his arm.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Little Ding Bao. So you got here, eh?

DING BAO: You told me to come. Would I dare not to?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Proprietor Wang, what do you think of the little honey I found for you? Looks, age, dress, experience — she's a standout all around.

WANG LIFA: But can I afford her?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: No problem. She doesn't need a salary. Right, Little Ding Bao?

WANG LIFA: No salary?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Listen, old fellow, you don't have to worry about a thing. I'll take care of everything for you. Me and Little Ding Bao have things all set up. Eh, Little Ding Bao?

DING BAO: Without your set-ups, what would we do for injustice?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Injustice? Yes, you're right. It was right here that my father was seized. If you don't believe me, ask Proprietor Wang. Right, Proprietor Wang?

WANG LIFA: I saw it with my own eyes.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: You see, Little Ding Bao, I'm not just shooting my face off. They seized him and chopped his head off, right out there on the street — one "kezha!" with their bloody sword. Right, Proprietor Wang?

WANG LIFA: I heard the chop.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: So I wasn't kidding, was I, Little Ding Bao? But my father didn't really amount to much. He never really got anywhere. Now it's my turn to show what I can do, and I'm going to make it big. (*Opens briefcase and takes out a book of plans.*) Look at this, Little Ding Bao — take a look at my plans.

DING BAO: I don't have the time. I think I'd better go home and rest up for work tomorrow.

WANG LIFA: Ding Bao, I need time to think this over.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Proprietor Wang, I've already done the thinking for you. If you don't believe me, just wait and see. Tomorrow morning with Little Ding Bao by the

door, giving them her old come-on, you'll have a couple of hundred customers in here before you know what's happened. Little Ding Bao, you'd better listen to my plan — you're part of it.

DING BAO: Humph! I only wish I wasn't part of it.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: I don't know about you, Little Ding Bao, you're too bloody negative. Listen. . . .

(*Lightbill Collector enters.*)

LIGHTBILL COLLECTOR: Proprietor, your light bill.

WANG LIFA: Light bill? How many months do I owe?

LIGHTBILL COLLECTOR: Three months.

WANG LIFA: Why don't you wait three more months, and make it a full half year — I can't pay anyway.

LIGHTBILL COLLECTOR: Come on. Don't be smart.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: He's dead serious. This place is under Director Shen's control. You know who Director Shen is, I expect. He's a member of the municipal KMT party committee and Director of the General Headquarters of the Special Police. You want to collect his light bill, do you? Speak up!

LIGHTBILL COLLECTOR: Don't be silly. Of course not. I'm sorry, I think I'm in the wrong place. (*Exits.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Well, what do you think, Proprietor Wang? Did you see how well I handled that? Your bag of nineteenth-century tricks is way out of date.

WANG LIFA: You're right there. That's why we say a man should never stop learning. It's time I did some serious studying.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: You bet it is!

(*Little Soothsayer Tang enters wearing a lined silk gown and new satin shoes.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Aiyo! I'll be a son-of-a-bitch if it isn't Little Soothsayer Tang.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Aiyo! I'll be a son-of-a-bitch if it isn't Little Pockface Liu. Come here. Let your old grandad have a gander. (*Inspects him, front and back.*) You little bugger, you. Decked out in those Western duds, from

behind you look more like a foreigner than a foreigner. Old Proprietor Wang, I've been studying the stars, and the Ziwei Constellation is unusually bright. No doubt about it, there's going to be a new Son of Heaven before very long. Then you're going to see how me, Little Pockface Liu, and Madam. . . .

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Little Ding Bao — the whole city knows her.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: . . . and Madam Little Ding Bao were born for the times. Talented, handsome, sophisticated, aggressive — at last we're going to come into our own. Old Proprietor, turn your face this way. Let me see now. . . . Good. Good. Promising forehead. Still some good luck left in that old carcass of yours. Well then, how about a bowl of tea?

WANG LIFA: Little Soothsayer Tang!

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: I'm not a soothsayer any more. I've got a title: "Court Astrologer".

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: And who made you Court Astrologer?

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: You'll know soon enough.

WANG LIFA: Court Astrologer, your father drank on the house his whole life, but may I point out that it wasn't a hereditary privilege.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, when I don my official Court Astrologer's robes, you'll be sorry you said that. You just wait and see.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Little Tang, we'll go for coffee later, with Little Ding Bao; but I've got something important to discuss with you first. What do you say?

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, you forget that a free cup of tea for the Court Astrologer today could mean a county magistrate's job for you tomorrow. What's on your mind, Little Liu?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: I was just telling Little Ding Bao I've got a fantastic plan.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Great. I'm all ears.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: I want to set up a "tlust". That's an American word, maybe you don't understand. In Beijing talk it's a *baoyuaner* — you know, a place that looks after everything.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Of course I understand. You mean you want to take over all the girls in Beijing.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Right. You're a sharp boy. Little Ding Bao, you listen too — you're intimately involved in this. Even Proprietor Wang's involved.

WANG LIFA: I'm listening.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: I want to bring together all the taxi-dancers, licensed and unlicensed whores, jeep-girls, and come-on hostesses, and set up a huge "tlust".

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG (*eyes closed in thought*): Have you got it okayed up above?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Of course! Director Shen is going to be Chairman of the Board, and I'm going to be General Manager.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: And me?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: If you can come up with an elegant name, we'll make you Head Consultant.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: I won't be paid in worthless government dollars, will I?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: No! No Chinese stuff! American dollars. Every month!

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Go on, go on!

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: We'll have four main departments: a Purchase and Sales Department, a Transportation Department, a Training Department, and a Service Department. Whether someone wants to buy a girl or sell a girl, whether they're to be sent from Shanghai to Tianjin or from Hankou to Chongqing, whether it's training a jeep-girl or a come-on hostess, or whether it's servicing American troops or our own government officials — all levels; it'll all be handled by our company. Satisfaction guaranteed! How's that sound?

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Fantastic! Fantastic! As

far as management theory goes, it's in line with all the rules; and even better, it will satisfy the demands of the American soldiers and benefit the state too.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Right. Now it's up to you to think of a nice name. Something poetic, like "willow-leaf eyebrows, almond-kernel eyes, and cherry lips" — something really elegant.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Mmmh. "Tlust" — *tuo-la-si.* In Chinese that's "push-pull-tear" — nothing elegant in that. Push them in, pull them in, and if they don't play ball, tear them apart. Sounds like we're going to kidnap them and tear them to shreds. Not too refined.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: You're right, it isn't refined. But it's an American word, and it's very popular.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: I'd prefer "United Something, Something Corporation". Sounds better, and it's more respectable.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: I guess you're right, but "United" what "Corporation"?

DING BAO: How about "Injustice Incorporated"? Suits it to a T.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Little Ding Bao, be serious. This is no time for nonsense. If you work hard, you have a good chance of becoming head instructor for the come-on hostesses.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: How's this? "United Double Blossom Corporation"? Aren't the girls like fresh blossoms? And the more they're used, the more our bank accounts blossom. So — "Double Blossom". "Between green hills and azure seas, the world teems blossom upon blossom" — that's from the traditional opera, *Wu Family Hills.* What do you think?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Little Tang, thanks, thanks a million! (*Enthusiastically shakes hands.*) I'm going to find Director Shen and discuss it with him right away. If he likes it, you're in as Head Consultant. (*Puts papers in briefcase; is about to go.*)

WANG LIFA: Just a minute. What exactly's the situation with Little Ding Bao?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Didn't I tell you to let me handle it? The "Tlust" is going to handle everything. I'm giving it a trial run here.

DING BAO: Didn't you promise to take us for coffee?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Ask Little Tang if he's going.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: You two go ahead, I'm waiting here for someone.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Come on, Little Ding Bao, let's go.

DING BAO: See you tomorrow, Old Proprietor. So long, Court Astrologer. (*Exists with Little Pockface Liu.*)

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, bring me the paper.

WANG LIFA: Well, I'll do the best I can. I think maybe I still have a few copies from several years ago.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Shit!

(*Three Customers enter; Chef Ming, Zou Fuyuan and Wei Fuxi. Chef Ming sits by himself; Zou and Wei sit together. Wang Lifa knows them all, and nods to them in greeting.*)

WANG LIFA: I'm very sorry, brothers, but I have to ask you to pay in advance.

CHEF MING: There's nothing wrong with that, Elder Brother.

WANG LIFA: Ai! "Pay in advance." It pains me to say it. (*Busies himself making tea.*)

ZOU FUYUAN: What have you decided, Proprietor Wang? Are you going to have more storytellers in the evenings?

WANG LIFA: I had them, but it didn't work out. It was a waste of electricity, nobody was coming.

ZOU FUYUAN: Too true. At Huixian Hall the day before yesterday, you know, I told the story of how the Three Knights, Four Sworn Brothers, Five Braves, Ten Gallants, Thirteen Heroes, Nine Grandads, and Fifteen Lads, smashed the bandit stronghold at Phoenix Peak, how the hundred birds paid homage to the phoenix, and how the phoenix's leg

was hurt. Guess how many came to hear it?

WANG LIFA: How many? You're the only one left who knows how to tell that story.

ZOU FUYUAN: You're right on there; but only five people showed up — and two gate-crashers.

WEI FUXI: Any way you look at it, friend, you're better off than me. I haven't had a part for more than a month.

ZOU FUYUAN: But why did you switch to Beijing Opera?

WEI FUXI: I've got the voice and the appearance, so why not?

ZOU FUYUAN: But when you're on stage you don't put your heart into it.

WEI FUXI: You sing a whole bloody opera, and you're barely paid enough to buy a few coarse biscuits. Why should I kill myself? You think I'm nuts?

ZOU FUYUAN: Ai! Fuxi, you know what's happening to us? We're losing out to popular songs and vulgar operas like "Spinning Cotton". The way I see it, whether you and I live or die isn't important; what really pains me is that our art may die out in a few years. That would be really letting the old masters down. An old saying has it that "Tradition survives trend". But right now we're swamped with new trends, and our traditions are rotting away — roots and all.

WANG LIFA: Ai! (*Goes over to Chef Ming.*) Chef Ming, you haven't been here for ages.

CHEF MING: I haven't been able to get out. I'm doing the cooking in Beijing Prison.

WANG LIFA: You! You're used to handling grand banquets for hundreds of guests. And now they have you steaming prisoners' cornbread?

CHEF MING: But what else can you do? These days there're more people in prison than there are on the outside. Banquets? I've even sold all my dinner services.

(*Sixth-Born Fang enters carrying some scroll paintings.*)

CHEF MING: Sixth Elder, over here. Have you got rid of those two dinner services for me? I need money.

SIXTH-BORN FANG: Chef Ming, why don't you take one

of these paintings as payment?

CHEF MING: Huh? What do I want with a picture?

SIXTH-BORN FANG: But they're beautiful. They're by the Liuda Hermit, Dong Ruomei.

CHEF MING: I don't care how good they are, they won't fill my belly.

SIXTH-BORN FANG: He cried when he gave them to me.

CHEF MING: I cried too, when I gave you all that dinnerware.

SIXTH-BORN FANG: I know very well who's crying and who's eating fine meat. If I didn't, I wouldn't be wasting away so. I suppose you think that all our trade involves is going about the streets beating our little drums?

CHEF MING: Sixth Elder, every man has to have a bit of conscience. Surely you're not going to cheat an old friend?

SIXTH-BORN FANG: Two dinner services? What do they amount to? If you understood anything about friendship, you wouldn't mention them again.

(*Che Dangdang enters, clicking two silver dollars together.*)

CHE DANGDANG: Anyone interested? Like to buy a couple of silver dollars? Court Astrologer, how about you?

(*Little Soothsayer Tang doesn't answer.*)

WANG LIFA: Dangdang, you'd better try somewhere else. I don't even remember what silver dollars look like.

CHE DANGDANG: Well then, old fellow, why don't you have a good look? You don't have to buy a ticket — it's free.

(*Tosses coins on the table.*)

(*Fourth Aunt Pang enters with her bond-servant, Chunmei. Fourth Aunt's fingers are encrusted with rings, and she is decked out in tasteless finery. Old Yang, a hawker, follows her in.*)

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Your Highness.

SIXTH-BORN FANG and CHE DANGDANG: Your Highness.

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Court Astrologer Tang.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Your humble servant, Your Highness. (*Helps her take a seat and pours her some*

tea.)

FOURTH AUNT PANG (*noticing Che Dangdang is about to leave*): Hang on, Dangdang.

CHE DANGDANG: But of course.

OLD YANG (*opening his case*): Your Highness, take a look at this.

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Sing that little hawkers' jingle of yours. Damned if I don't get a kick out of it.

OLD YANG: With pleasure. Yankee needles, Yankee notions, Yankee toothpaste, Yankee potions. Lipsticks red, and cold cream white; nylon stockings, sheer delight. You name it chum, I'll sell you one — unless you want an atom bomb.

FOURTH AUNT PANG (*laughing and choosing two pairs of stockings*): Chunmei, take these. Dangdang, pay Old Yang.

CHE DANGDANG: Do I have to, Your Highness?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Interest is piling up on that money I gave you. How much do you owe me? Court Astrologer, check the accounts.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Immediately! (*Takes out a small notebook.*)

CHE DANGDANG: There's no need to go to so much trouble. I'll square things with Old Yang.

OLD YANG: Your Highness, have a heart. You can't really believe he'd pay me?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Old Yang, there's no way he can cheat you when I'm here.

OLD YANG: Of course not. (*To the audience.*) Anyone else like to take a peep? (*Starts to chant.*) Yankee needles, Yan. . . .

FOURTH AUNT PANG: That's enough. Get lost!

OLD YANG: Of course. Yankee needles, Yankee thread, if I don't go my name's shithead. Let's go, Dangdang. (*Exits with Che Dangdang.*)

SIXTH-BORN FANG (*coming over*): Your Highness, I've got hold of a set of five cloisonné sacrificial vessels. They're very old, and they're genuine stuff. Cheap too. They'd look

perfect on the altar. Why don't you have a look at them?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Ask the Emperor to look at them.

SIXTH-BORN FANG: Yes, of course. The Emperor's going to ascend the throne very shortly, eh? My congratulations! I'll go get them and have them put on the altar right way. If Your Highness helps talk him into it, there'll be something in it for you — for sure. (*Moves towards exit.*)

CHEF MING: Sixth-Born Fang, what about my stuff?

SIXTH-BORN FANG: You haven't looked over those paintings yet. (*Exits.*)

CHEF MING: Come back here. Cheat me out of two sets of dinnerware, will you? I've still got my cleaver! (*Exits in pursuit.*)

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Proprietor Wang, Mother Kang lives here, doesn't she? Ask her to come in.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: I'll get her. (*Runs to rear.*) Elder Mother Kang, would you come here a moment please?

WANG LIFA: What's the matter?

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: An important court matter!

(*Kang Shunzi enters.*)

KANG SHUNZI: What do you want?

FOURTH AUNT PANG (*rushing to meet her*): My dearest old mother-in-law! I'm the wife of your fourth nephew. I've come to meet you. Won't you please sit down? (*Drags her to a seat.*)

KANG SHUNZI: Fourth Nephew's wife?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Yes, indeed. But I wasn't married into the Pang family until after you'd left them.

KANG SHUNZI: I have nothing to do with the Pangs any more. What do you want with me?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Your fourth nephew, Haishun, is a high potentate in the Sanhuangdao Society, a big shot in the Kuomintang — and he's also the sworn brother of Director Shen. He's about to become the new emperor. Isn't that thrilling news?

KANG SHUNZI: About to become emperor?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Uh! His Dragon Robes are already made. He's ascending the throne very soon — in the Western Hills.

KANG SHUNZI: The Western Hills?

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Elder Mother, the Eighth Route Army is in the Western Hills. If Fourth Elder Pang wipes them out, how could the Nanjing Government be against his ascending the throne?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Fourth Elder is ready, though he's taken a fancy to women and liquor lately. He's already gathered together quite a nest of concubines.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Your Highness, the Imperial quarters are supposed to house seventy-two concubines. It's in the official statutes.

FOURTH AUNT PANG: You're not empress. How could you know what an empress has to put up with? Elder Mother, this is my idea: if you'll go along with me, I'll let you be Empress Dowager, and the two of us can handle the Emperor. That'll make my job a bit easier, won't it? Elder Mother, if you come with me, you'll eat and drink nothing but the best, and have plenty of silver dollars to jingle in your purse. Won't that be grand?!

KANG SHUNZI: And if I refuse?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Uh? Refuse? (*Becomes hostile.*)

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Elder Mother, you'd better think it over — carefully.

KANG SHUNZI: What for? I'm finished with the Pangs — for good. Fourth Nephew's wife, you stick to your empressing, I'll stick to my cleaning and cooking. You stay out of my life and I'll stay out of yours. Go ahead and scowl; you think you scare me? I've been around a few years, and I know how to take care of myself. You scowl at me and you'll get a punch in the nose. (*Gets up and heads for rear.*)

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Elder Mother! Elder Mother!

KANG SHUNZI (*stopping and turning to face Little Soothsayer Tang*): You . . . you good-for-nothing punk, have you no

self-respect? Don't you think it's time you earned an honest bowl of rice?

FOURTH AUNT PANG (*shifting her anger to Wang Lifa*): Proprietor Wang, come here! You go and talk to that old bag. Convince her, and I'll give you a sack of good flour. If you don't, I'll have this place smashed up. Court Astrologer, let's go.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, I'll be back this evening for your answer.

WANG LIFA: What if I'm dead before then?

FOURTH AUNT PANG: Damn it! You don't deserve to live, anyway. (*Exits with Little Soothsayer Tang and Chunmei.*)

WANG LIFA: Humph!

ZOU FUYUAN: Well now, what kind of performance would you call that? (*Laughs heartily.*)

WEI FUXI: I know more than two hundred roles, but that one's not among them. Do you know where the old bitch got her connections?

ZOU FUYUAN: Everyone knows. She's the daughter of the racketeer Dong Batian. She had a baby before . . . enough — forget them. That pack of scoundrels are in their dying throes. They're running out of time.

(*Wang Dashuan enters.*)

WANG LIFA: Look after the front for a bit, Elder Son, I have to go out back to discuss something. (*Exits.*)

LITTLE ERDEZI (*shouting outside*): Out of my way! (*Enters.*) Dashuan, Elder Brother, steep a pot of your best. I've got cash. (*Takes out four silver dollars and slaps them down on the table one at a time.*) You figure it out. I just spent one dollar; I've still got four. I get fifty cents per mugging, so how many have I thrashed?

WANG DASHUAN: Ten.

LITTLE ERDEZI (*counting on his fingers*): Right. Four the day before and six yesterday. Of course, ten it is. Dashuan, Elder Brother, take a couple of dollars. When I'm broke I drink your tea for free, when I'm loaded you get a share. Go

ahead, take it. (*Blows on one, then puts it to his ear to listen.*) Good one. Worth two. Take it.

WANG DASHUAN (*before accepting it*): Little Erdezi, what kind of business is this good? Silver dollars are hard to come by.

LITTLE ERDEZI: I've been going to school.

WANG DASHUAN: You don't know a character from a carrying pole. What are you studying?

LITTLE ERDEZI (*taking the teapot from the table and drinking from the spout, in a whisper*): The local party committee of the Kuomintang is sending me to the Institute of Law and Politics. I've never had such a fantastic job. Fantastic! It's what I've always wanted. Beats the rackets in Tianqiao any day. Half a dollar for every student I mug. How many did I get yesterday?

WANG DASHUAN: Six.

LITTLE ERDEZI: Right! Including two girls. A couple of punches and down they go. Fantastic! Just what I've always been after. Dashuan, Elder Brother, feel this. (*Tenses his biceps.*) Solid as American cement! Fantastic, eh? — using the old biceps to knock 'em around.

WANG DASHUAN: Are they so meek they let you beat them?

LITTLE ERDEZI: I single out the meek ones. You think I'm an idiot?

WANG DASHUAN: Little Erdezi, listen to me. Mugging people is no way to make a decent living.

LITTLE ERDEZI: Why not? When the Dean of Instruction for Party Policy gives a lecture, he lays his pistol on the desk. All I've done is lay my fist on a few heads. I don't use a pistol.

WANG DASHUAN: Dean of Instruction, my foot. He's a hoodlum.

LITTLE ERDEZI: Yes. A hoodlum. No — that'd make me a hoodlum too. Dashuan, Elder Brother, are you twisting things around to insult me? I've got muscles like cement, remember. You'd better wise up, unless you want a few

broken bones.

WANG DASHUAN: Even if you beat me to death, if I don't give in, you can't really get the best of me, can you?

LITTLE ERDEZI: Huh? You can sure dream up a bunch of slippery hocus-pocus. Dashuan, Elder Brother, you should be a party teacher, you've got the talent for it. Let's drop it, eh? I've finished mugging students for today anyway.

WANG DASHUAN: What's the point of stopping for a day? You shouldn't do it at all.

LITTLE ERDEZI: I'm not doing it today because I've got a different job.

WANG DASHUAN: What job?

LITTLE ERDEZI: Today I'm working over teachers.

WANG DASHUAN: Working over teachers? Beating students is wrong. Is beating teachers any better?

LITTLE ERDEZI: I do what those up above tell me. They told me the teachers were going on strike. Striking is reactionary, and whoever's reactionary gets a beating. They told me to wait here and work over any teachers who come by.

ZOU FUYUAN (*sensing danger*): I think it's about time we left.

WEI FUXI: Let's go. (*Exits with Zou Fuyuan.*)

LITTLE ERDEZI: Dashuan, Elder Brother, aren't you going to take this dollar?

WANG DASHUAN: Money earned beating girl students? I don't want it.

LITTLE ERDEZI (*taking a different one*): Take a different one then. This one's for two guys. How's that? (*Dashuan shakes his head in refusal.*) Then how about at least keeping an eye out while I go and buy some fancy grub for us to eat? What's life for, if it isn't to eat, drink and have a bit of fun, eh? (*Picks up his money and exits.*)

(*Kang Shunzi enters carrying a small bundle. Wang Lifa and Zhou Xiuhua are with her.*)

KANG SHUNZI: If you change your mind and want me to stay, I'll stay.

WANG LIFA: I. . . .

ZHOU XIUHUA: I don't think Fourth Aunt Pang will smash your teahouse.

WANG LIFA: How do you know? It doesn't take much to provoke the Sanhuangdao Society, does it?

KANG SHUNZI: It's Dali's visit that really has me worried. If anything leaks out, you've all had it. That's a lot worse than them smashing up the teahouse.

WANG DASHUAN: You'd better go, Auntie. I'll get you out of the city. Papa, I'll see our old friend off, okay?

WANG LIFA: Mmmh. . . .

ZHOU XIUHUA: For years Auntie has worked her fingers to the bone for us. The least we can do is see her off.

WANG LIFA: I didn't say he shouldn't. See her off! See her off!

WANG DASHUAN: Hang on a minute, Auntie, I'll get a jacket. (*Exits.*)

ZHOU XIUHUA: Papa, what's the matter?

WANG LIFA: Leave me alone, I'm confused. I've never been so confused in my whole life. Daughter-in-law, you go with Auntie. I'll tell Elder Son to catch up with you. Auntie, if you don't like it there, you're always welcome here.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Auntie, this place will always be your home.

WANG LIFA: But who knows? Perhaps. . . .

KANG SHUNZI: I'll never forget any of you. Old Proprietor, take care of yourself. (*Exits with Zhou Xiuhua.*)

WANG LIFA (*follows them towards the door, then stops*): Take care of myself? What for?

(*Xie Yongren and Yu Houzhai enter.*)

XIE YONGREN (*noticing the signs on the wall and putting his tea money on the table*): Oldtimer, some tea please. (*Sits.*)

WANG LIFA (*taking money*): Right away.

YU HOUZHAI: Yongren, I'm afraid this may be our last time together in a teahouse, mmh?

XIE YONGREN: I just might be here a lot. I've decided to change jobs — drive a pedicab.

YU HOUZHAI: Driving a pedicab will be a lot better than teaching primary school. No doubt about that.

XIE YONGREN: Some luck — teaching phys-ed. It's a joke. Teaching sports when neither I nor the students get enough to eat.

(*Wang Xiaohua runs in.*)

WANG LIFA: Xiaohua, how come school's out so early?

WANG XIAOHUA: The teachers have gone on strike. (*Sees Yu Houzhai and Xie Yongren.*) Teacher Yu! Teacher Xie! Why weren't you at school? Aren't you going to teach us any more? You've got to teach us! When you didn't come we all cried. We had a meeting and we all agreed to be better students from now on, and not ever make you angry.

YU HOUZHAI: Xiaohua, we don't want you to miss school either, but how can we teach without enough to eat? We have children ourselves. It's wrong for them to suffer just so we can teach other people's children, isn't it? My sweet, don't worry, we're going to a meeting as soon as we finish our tea. Perhaps we'll find an answer.

XIE YONGREN: Do a good job of reviewing your lesson, Xiaohua; don't just waste time playing.

(*Wang Dashuan enters from rear with a small bundle.*)

WANG XIAOHUA: These are my teachers, Papa.

WANG DASHUAN: Teachers, eh? You'd better get out of here. They've got someone laying for you.

WANG LIFA: Who?

WANG DASHUAN: Little Erdezi. He just left, but he's coming right back.

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, here's your tea money. (*Returns it.*) Take it, please. Hurry.

WANG DASHUAN: Follow me.

(*Little Erdezi enters.*)

LITTLE ERDEZI: There's a big street demonstration. Son-of-a-bitch, can't buy a thing. Dashuan, Elder Brother, where're you going? Who're those two guys?

WANG DASHUAN: Customers. (*Leaving with Yu Houzhai and Xie Yongren.*)

LITTLE ERDEZI: Come back here! Eh? Won't listen? I'll teach you a lesson.

WANG LIFA: Little Erdezi.

LITTLE ERDEZI (*throwing a punch*): Try this for size.

XIE YONGREN (*landing a blow on Little Erdezi's face and kicking his feet from under him*): Try that for size!

LITTLE ERDEZI: Aiyo! (*Falls.*)

WANG XIAOHUA: Hurrah!

XIE YONGREN: Come on! Get up!

LITTLE ERDEZI (*getting up feeling his face*): Huh! Huh! (*Retreats.*) Huh!

WANG DASHUAN: Hurry. (*Urges two teachers out.*)

LITTLE ERDEZI (*shifting his anger*): Old Proprietor, you're in for it now; you let them go. I'll settle with you later. Just because I couldn't handle them, doesn't mean that I can't handle a stupid old fart like you. (*Exits.*)

WANG XIAOHUA: Grandpa! Grandpa! Little Erdezi's after our teachers, isn't he? It's awful!

WANG LIFA: Don't worry, he's afraid of them. I've known lots like him. Let them push you around and they will, but if you stand up to them they turn tail soon enough.

WANG XIAOHUA: Is he going to hurt you, Grandpa?

WANG LIFA: Me? Your Grandpa knows how to deal with guys like that.

WANG XIAOHUA: Where did papa go?

WANG LIFA: He'll be back soon. Don't worry about him. My sweet little girl, why don't you go and study?

WANG XIAOHUA: Oh, I hope nothing happens to our teachers. I'm really worried. (*Exits.*)

(*Ding Bao runs in.*)

DING BAO: Old Proprietor! Old Proprietor! There's something I've got to tell you.

WANG LIFA: What is it, Miss?

DING BAO: That Little Pockface Liu, he's up to no good. He's planning to take over your teahouse.

WANG LIFA: Take over my teahouse? Why? What could they want with a rundown old teahouse like this?

DING BAO: They'll be here any minute. I don't have time to explain. You'd better think of something.

WANG LIFA: Thanks for the warning, Miss.

DING BAO: I'm taking chances telling you this. Please don't give me away.

WANG LIFA: Don't you worry, Miss. I still have my wits about me.

DING BAO: Thanks. See you later. (*Exits.*)

(*Zhou Xiuhua enters.*)

ZHOU XIUHUA: Papa, they made it through the city gates.

WANG LIFA: Good.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Your son told me to tell you not to worry. He'll see her to Dali's and then come back.

WANG LIFA: He can come back or stay there — it makes no difference.

ZHOU XIUHUA: Papa, what's the matter? Why are you so upset?

WANG LIFA: Nothing, nothing. Go and look after Xiaohua. Didn't she want some noodles? If there's any flour left, why don't you make her a bowl of noodles? Poor child, she doesn't get enough to eat.

ZHOU XIUHUA: We don't have a speck of decent flour left, but I'll see if I can make her some coarse dumpling soup. (*Exits.*)

(*Little Soothsayer Tang enters.*)

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, has she agreed?

WANG LIFA: Tonight. I'll have a definite answer for you tonight.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, you're always complaining that my father never paid for his tea. Right now I'm going to square his debt by helping you save your skin. I'm warning you, the Sanhuangdao Society is worse than the Japanese ever were. They'll smash up your teahouse without a second thought. So you'd better smarten up.

WANG LIFA: You save my skin? All you want is a yes from me to impress your so-called "Empress" with. Isn't that so? (*Little Song Enzi and Little Wu Xiangzi enter, dressed in the latest Western fashion.*)

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Plenty busy today, eh, gentlemen?

LITTLE SONG ENZI: Busy isn't the word. Hundreds of school teachers are rebelling.

WANG LIFA: Gentlemen, since when did a strike become a rebellion?

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Can you stop them?

LITTLE WU XIANGZI: Can we stop them? So far we've thrown over a hundred in jail, and beaten the shit out of seventy or eighty more. That'll teach them to rebel!

LITTLE SONG ENZI: They don't know a good thing when it's staring them in the face. If they'd just keep in line, the Americans'd send us boatloads of rice and wheat flour.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: They sure don't. But, Gentlemen, if you do get some rice or flour please don't forget me. I'll do my utmost to choose a lucky site for your tombs. Well, I'll let you two carry on. (*Exits.*)

LITTLE WU XIANGZI: Did you just ask if striking was called rebellion now, Proprietor Wang?

WANG LIFA: When you're old and you can't keep up with the changes, you have to ask, haven't you?

LITTLE SONG ENZI: Humph! You're in the same bloody league they're in.

WANG LIFA: Me? I'm afraid you overestimate me.

LITTLE WU XIANGZI: We don't have time to beat around the bush with you — so out with it.

WANG LIFA: Out with what?

LITTLE SONG ENZI: When teachers rebel, there's got to be a ringleader.

WANG LIFA: Who?

LITTLE WU XIANGZI: Who was here last night?

WANG LIFA: Kang Dali.

LITTLE SONG ENZI: That's our man. Hand him over.

WANG LIFA: If I knew what he was doing I wouldn't have mentioned his name, would I? I was around your fathers long enough to pick up at least that much, wasn't I?

LITTLE WU XIANGZI: Cut the crap and give it to us

straight.

WANG LIFA: Money or the man, is that your game?

LITTLE SONG ENZI: Right! My father did a good job with you. The man or some of that gold you've been saving up. Lots of shops have come and gone, but you've hung on for all these years. You must have a nice little nest egg. (*Little Erdezi rushes in.*)

LITTLE ERDEZI: We've got to get out of here, we're outnumbered. Come on!

LITTLE WU XIANGZI: You little bastard, don't you know what you're hired for?

LITTLE ERDEZI: I didn't sit idle; look what they've done to my face.

LITTLE SONG ENZI: We'll be back, Proprietor, so you'd better come up with something.

WANG LIFA: What if I'm not here?

LITTLE WU XIANGZI: Are you kidding, you old fart? We'll get you no matter where you go. (*Strikes Wang Lifa, then exits with Little Song Enzi and Little Erdezi.*)

WANG LIFA (*calling to the back*): Xiaohua! Xiaohua's Mother!

ZHOU XIUHUA (*running in with Xiaohua*): I heard everything. What shall we do?

WANG LIFA: You'd better get out of here right away. Catch up with Mother Kang. Hurry.

WANG XIAOHUA: I'll get my schoolbag. (*Exits.*)

ZHOU XIUHUA: Bring two changes of clothes, Xiaohua. Papa, we can't leave you here by yourself.

WANG LIFA: This is my teahouse. I'll stay here till the day I die.

(*Wang Xiaohua runs in with her schoolbag over her shoulder and a bundle under her arm.*)

ZHOU XIUHUA: Papa.

WANG XIAOHUA: Grandpa.

WANG LIFA: Don't cry. Go! (*Pulls out from his jacket his few remaining dollars and an old photograph.*) Daughter-in-law, it's not much, but take it. Xiaohua, you take care of

this — it's a picture of our teahouse, taken over thirty years ago. Give it to your papa. Now, go.

(*Little Pockface Liu and Ding Bao enter.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Xiaohua, going to Granny's while the teachers are on strike?

WANG XIAOHUA: Yes.

WANG LIFA (*picking up the ruse*): Daughter-in-law, come back as soon as you can.

ZHOU XIUHUA: We'll only stay a couple of days, Papa. (*Exits with Wang Xiaohua.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Proprietor Wang, great news. Director Shen has okayed my plan.

WANG LIFA: Wonderful. I'm very happy for you.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: For yourself too. Director Shen's okayed remodelling your teahouse. As soon as I suggested it he said, "Yessiree!" It's neat, the way he says it — sounds like a foreigner.

WANG LIFA: What do you mean? What's going on?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: You're going on — going on holiday, because I'm taking over and you're moving out. Got that straight? I don't want you hanging around here bothering me.

WANG LIFA: No danger of that. It just so happens I was planning to move out.

DING BAO: Little Liu, the old proprietor has spent his whole life here. You can't just kick him out, can you?

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: We'll see. I've always been a square dealer. Proprietor Wang, I'm going to get the Director to come and look the place over. Clean it up a bit. Little Ding Bao, go and get Little Xinyan. I want the two of you here to receive the Director. Bring some perfume and give the place a spray. It stinks. Let's go. (*Exits with Ding Bao.*)

WANG LIFA: Good! Wonderful! Too wonderful for words. (*Laughs ironically.*)

(*Fourth Elder Chang enters carrying a small basket. In the basket there is some valueless paper money, the kind which*

is either scattered or burned at funerals and some peanuts. Although he is over seventy, he still holds himself quite erect.)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Too wonderful for words? My old friend, what is it that's so wonderful?

WANG LIFA: Aiyo! Fourth Brother Chang. You're just the person I wanted to see. I'll make a nice pot of tea, and we can have a chat. (*Goes to make tea.*)

(*Qin Zhongyi enters. He has aged terribly, and his clothes are badly worn.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: Is Proprietor Wang around?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Yes, he's here. You're. . . .

QIN ZHONGYI: My name is Qin. . . .

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Second Elder Qin!

WANG LIFA (*entering with tea*): Who? Second Elder Qin? You're the other person I wanted to see. Our teahouse is in for another big "reform". Sit down, sit down.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Here, have some peanuts. (*Takes some himself.*) A nice cup of tea and a handful of peanuts. Could anything be better?

QIN ZHONGYI: Well, some teeth would help.

WANG LIFA: Talk about irony. We haven't had any peanuts for God knows how long, and now we haven't got any teeth. What a laugh. What brings you here, Second Elder Qin? (*They all sit down.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: Nobody else will listen to me, so I've come to talk to you. I've just been to Tianjin to have a look at my factory.

WANG LIFA: Wasn't it confiscated? Don't tell me they've given it back to you. That's wonderful news!

QIN ZHONGYI: It's been demolished.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG and WANG LIFA: Demolished?

QIN ZHONGYI: Demolished. Forty years of my life — demolished. No one else knows, but Proprietor Wang, you know — from my early twenties I've advocated saving the country by industrializing it. And now . . . I accepted the seizure of my factory. I'm just a little guy, so there was nothing I could do. But it was a good factory — well run.

It could have made money for the country. But what did they do? They demolished it and sold all the wrecked equipment as scrap. Is there anywhere, anywhere in the whole world, that you'll find another government like this one? I'm asking you!

WANG LIFA: Do you remember? Way back when my rooming house was doing well, nothing would do but you had to build a warehouse. What happened? They locked it up and confiscated all your goods. After that, I warned you to hang on to some of your property, but nothing would do but you had to sell everything and build a factory.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Perhaps you'll remember too that it was round about that time that you ridiculed me for buying some noodles for the young mother who was selling her daughter?

QIN ZHONGYI: I know better now. Proprietor Wang, I'd like you to do something for me. (*Takes out several small machine parts and the barrel of a fountain pen.*) My factory was flattened. I picked these things up out of the rubble. This fountain pen has my name on it. It knows how many cheques I've signed, how many plans I've drawn up. Here, take them. When business is slow you can show them to your customers — give them a laugh. Tell them there was once an old fool named Qin who dreamt of opening factories. He ran one for scores of years, but in the end all he had to show for it was these few things that he grubbed out of the wreckage. You should tell them, if they have money they should spend it on wine and women — gamble and live it up. Hard work's a waste of time. Tell them that your friend Qin was in his seventies before he discovered this — a real bloody fool.

WANG LIFA: There's no point in giving your pen to me, I'm moving out of here myself.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Where to?

WANG LIFA: Anywhere. I'm different from you two fellows. Second Elder, you were wealthy, enterprising and ambitious, but big trees bear the brunt of the wind. And

Fourth Elder, your whole life you never relaxed your struggle against injustice. Me? My whole life I tried to please everybody. I bowed and scraped to whoever I had to. All I wanted was a decent life for my children — that they have enough to eat and wear, and not have to worry too much about calamity or disease. But when the Japs were here, Second Son had to flee, and my wife died of anguish. We got rid of the Japs finally, and things should have got better. You never know, do you? (*Laughs bitterly.*)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: I've done no better than you. Sure, I've earned my own way and lived an honest life, but I've got nowhere. I'm in my seventies, and I've been reduced to selling peanuts. One man doesn't matter, but what does matter — what really matters — is our country. If China could only pull herself together and put an end to the humiliations suffered at the hands of foreigners. But.... (*Laughs bitterly.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: When the Japanese were here, they talked about co-operation. They co-operated my factory right out of my hands. When our own government returned, for no reason at all my factory was classified as traitor's property, and I don't know how much was in that warehouse. All of it — gone! (*Laughs bitterly.*)

WANG LIFA: Reform! I've never forgotten about reform, change — keeping up with the times. When the teahouse couldn't make it, I opened a rooming house; when the rooming house folded, I tried bringing in a storyteller; when he didn't draw an audience, I even considered hiring a come-on hostess — what the hell if I lost a little face, a man has to live, hasn't he? I tried anything and everything, but only so we could live. It's the truth. Sure, I bribed people when I had to, but I never did anything unjust or immoral. Don't I deserve a normal life? Who have I wronged? Who? Those bastards in the Imperial family still live a life of luxury, but I can't even get enough cornbread to fill my belly. It doesn't make sense.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: I only wish . . . I only wish that

people would be reasonable and fair with one another. But all my old friends, one after another, were murdered or starved to death. I witnessed it all. My grief's too deep for tears. Second Elder Song, my old friend, starved to death. I had to go out and beg for a coffin for him. He had me to beg a coffin for him. Myself? I love my country, but no one gives a damn about me. Look. (*Takes some paper money from his basket.*) I gathered this bit of fake funeral money after a funeral procession had passed. I don't have burial clothes or a coffin; but why not at least gather together a little funeral money for myself? (*Hearty laughter tinged with despair.*)

QIN ZHONGYI: Fourth Elder, why don't we scatter your funeral money and pay last respects to ourselves? — the three old fools.

WANG LIFA: Good idea! Fourth Elder, come on. Shout out some old-fashioned funeral cries.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*standing up, shouting*): This family orders the four standard bearers to disperse one hundred and twenty strings of cash! (*Scatters some funeral money.*)*

QIN ZHONGYI and WANG LIFA: One hundred and twenty strings of cash!

QIN ZHONGYI (*holding a hand of each of his friends*): What else is there to say? Goodbye. (*Exits.*)

WANG LIFA: Goodbye!

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: A last bowl of your tea. (*Drains bowl.*) Goodbye. (*Exits.*)

WANG LIFA: Goodbye.

(*Ding Bao and Little Xinyan enter.*)

DING BAO: They're here, Oldtimer. (*Sprays perfume.*)

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* In Beijing in the old days, thirty-two, forty-eight, or sixty-four bearers were employed to carry the coffins at funerals of the wealthy. Four additional men carrying banners were stationed at the four corners of the coffin bearing team. Teams of bearers were smoothly changed by observing signals given by these four standard bearers. The leading bearer would demand tips from the bereaved family and call out, in an exaggerated way, the amount of money they had been given. At the same time the paper funeral money would be scattered about.

WANG LIFA: Well, if they've come, I'm leaving. (*Picks up some paper money and starts off rear.*)

LITTLE XINYAN: Oldtimer, it looks like there's been a funeral.

WANG LIFA: Who can say? (*Exits.*)

(*Little Pockface Liu enters.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: He's here. One of you each side of the door. At attention.

(*Ding Bao and Little Xinyan stand at attention at either side of the door.*)

(*A car pulls up outside, and two Kuomintang Special Police enter. Director Shen enters dressed in military casuals. He is wearing high boots and spurs, and carries a quirt in his hand. Two more Special Police bring up the rear.*)

DIRECTOR SHEN (*looking over Ding Bao and Little Xinyan as if at a military inspection. As he looks each one over he repeats, with a foreign accent*): Yessiree!

(*Ding Bao brings a chair for Director Shen.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: Director Shen, old Yutai Teahouse has been in business over sixty years; everybody knows it. It's an ideal location; we can use it as one of our bases. It'll be perfect, we'll continue to sell tea, using (*pointing*) Little Ding Bao and Little Xinyan as hostesses. I'll keep my eyes open. There'll be people in here from all walks of life. We'll get all the information we need to track down the commies.

DIRECTOR SHEN: Yessiree!

(*Little Ding Bao takes a pack of Camel cigarettes from one Kuomintang Special Police officer and offers one to Director Shen. Little Xinyan accepts a lighter from the other and lights his cigarette.*)

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: The rear of this place used to be a warehouse. You've already taken care of the goods, so it's empty now. I'm going to fix it up. We'll have a small dancefloor in the centre, with bedrooms off both sides, each with its own plumbing. When you've got time to kill, sir, you can enjoy dancing, cards, and coffee. If it's late and you feel like a little more fun, you can spend the night. You can

treat the place as your private little club, sir. With me looking after it, it's certain to be a bit less inhibited, a bit more convenient, and a touch livelier than your own residence.

DIRECTOR SHEN: Yessiree!

DING BAO: Could I make a little suggestion?

DIRECTOR SHEN: Yessiree!

DING BAO: I really feel sorry for the old proprietor of this place. Couldn't you give him a uniform and keep him on as doorman? He could greet patrons, help them in and out of their cars. Everybody knows him, he's been here so long. He's sort of like an old trademark.

DIRECTOR SHEN: Yessiree! Bring him in.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU (*running to rear*): Proprietor Wang. Old Proprietor. My father's old friend. Dear Old-timer. (*Exits rear; a moment later he re-enters, running.*) Director! He's hung himself! He's dead!

DIRECTOR SHEN: Well, that's a pity. Yessiree!

(*Final curtain*)

Appendix

Relatively long intervals are required between the acts of this play to allow the actors to change costume. To make the intermissions seem shorter, and at the same time to briefly introduce the play, some clapper-ballads (*kuaiban*) have been included. Oddball Yang, who recites them, is to be considered a member of the cast.

Introduction to Act One

I'm Oddball Yang, a balladeer.
This is Yutai Teahouse; I'm always here.
It's a big teahouse, old Yutai is,
And it does a booming bit of biz.
There's lots of seats and lots of fun,
And lots of folk both old and young;
Some of them talk, and some of them sing —
There isn't two that look the same.
There's birds, there's crickets and katydids,
Cared for better than plenty of kids.
Some folks eat and some sip tea,
But if you're broke.... Well, watching's free.
If you're a chess fan come in and play
For a plate of meat balls — losers pay.
The local peacocks strut and preen
And make each sneeze a major scene.
But listen! If you'd keep your pate,
You'd better not talk about affairs of state.
Humph! State affairs are a sorry mess:
The Emperor's prestige is daily less,
And our Ministers, military and civil

Run when they see a foreign devil.
While foreign goods fill the marketplace,
And opium too — at a killing price.
Poor peasants — they're the sorriest ones —
They're forced to sell their daughters and sons.
As the rich got richer and the poor got poorer,
Tan Sitong rose up, a martyr;
And Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei . . .
They believed reform could save the day.
The Empress Dowager nearly burst;
She raged, she ground her teeth and cursed.
She screamed for blood, she screamed for heads;
"Reform's rebellion" — so she said.
So the less you say about reform,
The longer you'll keep your head from harm.
(*The curtain slowly rises. Oddball Yang enters the teahouse.*)
Clack goes my clapper, and in I stride
To find the teahouse boss inside.
Oldtimer there, would you like to hear the scene
About Yang Yanzhao and Mu Guiying?
(*Wang Lifa comes over to stop him.*)
You've made your pile, if I'm not wrong,
Of silver and gold, Proprietor Wang.
You've got money, but all I own
I, a hungry ballad-monger's tongue. (*Exits.*)

Introduction to Act Two

My clapper clacking, I'm here once more,
Tongue a' wagging, still dirt-poor.
The Great Qing Dynasty is through,
But a lot of people still wear queues.
Our old proprietor racks his brain
To modernize — he's all for change.
(*Aside.*) But all his effort is in vain;
There are certain things you can't attain.

The bloody warlords fight and curse;
You're rid of one and the next one's worse.
Zhao fights Qian and Sun fights Li,
It makes no sense that I can see.
But in order to fight they've got to have guns,
So they waste our wealth on foreign ones.
And wily old foreigners' business thrives
On warlord greed and civil strife.
Then the soldiers come, and the common folk
Lose grain and livestock at one fell stroke.
Old Proprietor Wang's a reforming fool,
His place has the air of a boarding school.
College students now live in the back
And fill the place with cultured talk.
Still, a bunch of those soldiers out for blood
Could finish his teahouse off for good.
Hey! This isn't the time for gloomy talk,
But rather to wish him the best of luck.
He's opening now, so I'll add a few lines —
To wish him well — I'm good at rhymes. (*Exits.*)
(*Re-enters.*)
Old Yutai Teahouse looks brand-new;
Here's hoping all goes well for you.
(*Wang Lifa: "We're not opening today; we're opening tomorrow."*)
Tomorrow's fine, tomorrow's great;
May gold and silver fill your plate.
(*Sound of artillery.*)
You're opening for business, they're opening fire;
There'll be trouble tomorrow or I'm a liar.
(*Wang Lifa: "Get your ass out of here!"*)
(*Exit Oddball Yang.*)

Introduction to Act Three

An old tree's limbs are bent and spare;
An old man's back is bent with care.

I'm finding it hard to get along,
Just like our friend, Old Proprietor Wang.
He's getting poor, and on in years,
And a threadbare jacket's all he has to wear.
Eight years the Japanese occupied
Old Beijing, old China's pride.
The people suffered without relief,
Their only choice was death or grief;
But the Eighth Route Army won their hearts
As it drove the cruel invaders out.
And they gazed with hope at the stars and moon;
Victory promised a new life, soon.
Humph! Now the Kuomintang are in Beijing,
Outdoing the Japs in everything.
Troubles galore plague Proprietor Wang;
Neither he nor I'll be around too long.
The old teahouse is a pretty sad case.
But nothing seems to work these days.
The country too's in a terrible mess,
Though the Big Shots roll in foreign cash. (*Exits.*)

Epilogue

(*After Proprietor Wang's death, Oddball Yang returns to find Ding Bao in tears.*)
Sweet young lady, dry your eyes;
It's a dark night, but the sun will rise.
Sweet young lady, don't you mope;
From the Western Hills flows a bright new hope.
A hope to wash away our grief,
And fill our hearts with new belief.
In a land where neither you nor I
Nor our children shall know slavery.

In Response to Some Questions About *Teahouse*

Since the production of *Teahouse*, a number of people have taken the trouble to write to me inquiring about such things as how I came to write the play. Time does not permit me to answer these letters individually, so I have chosen to answer here several of the most important of their questions.

QUESTION: What led you to write a play about a teahouse?

ANSWER: People from all walks of life came to the teahouses; they were frequented by people of every possible character and persuasion. Thus the teahouses were a microcosm of society as a whole. Although *Teahouse* is only a three-act play, it covers a span of about fifty years of historical change. In covering this period of change it was impossible to avoid political issues, but since I was never closely associated with the high officials of this period, I was unable to directly portray their careers. In addition to this, I am not an authority on politics; I knew only a few unimportant figures. But these were the sort that frequented the teahouses, so it seemed that, if I brought them together in a teahouse and reflected social change through the portrayal of the change in their lives, I would be revealing one face of the political change of the time. This is the reason I chose to write a play on this topic.

QUESTION: How did you go about settling questions of plot and character?

ANSWER: With so many characters and such a long time span, it becomes difficult to establish a central plot. I made use of four devices to overcome this difficulty. 1. The main characters of the play are present in every act, aging as the play progresses. In this way, although the play is loose, the

central characters provide a kind of focus which prevents the play from wandering and losing a sense of continuity. The characters carry the action in this play; this is much like traditional Chinese street theatre which portrayed events of the day, but at the same time it is different. In this play the characters are central, while in street theatre the events portrayed were central. 2. Secondary roles are passed from father to son, and are played by the same actors. This helps give the plot a sense of unity. It is merely a technique, not an expression of some theory, for in real life sons need not necessarily continue in the same fields as their fathers. In the theatre, however, having one actor play father and son makes it easier for the audience to see the relationship between the acts, which in this case are set many years apart. 3. I have tried to allow all characters to reveal themselves through their own speech and actions, but at the same time have attempted to draw in historical relationships. Thus, the chef is like a chef, the storyteller like a storyteller, because they talk about the things they know; but at the same time I have tied them in with historical circumstance. For example, reducing Chef Ming to cooking prisoners' food reveals that at that time a great many people were being thrown into prison. And when the storyteller complains that there is little interest in his art, it reveals that the tastes of that period had turned to the vulgar, that our traditional arts were in danger of being lost. In this way, although all the characters speak about their own lives, they at the same time reveal something of the age in which they were living. Even though some of them have only a few lines, they nonetheless clearly reveal the condition of their times. 4. Minor characters are arbitrarily brought on stage and removed as required.

Using these methods in presenting the characters of the play, it was relatively easy to handle the storyline. But another question has been raised about the plot. It has been suggested that it is weak, and that if I had based it upon Kang Shunzi's misfortune and Kang Dali's involvement in the revolution it would have been a more believable play.

I am grateful for such a suggestion, but cannot make use of it, because to do so would have made it difficult to achieve my aim of symbolically burying the three historical periods presented in the play. If I had used a single theme to develop the play, I'm afraid that the teahouse would have folded long before I could contrive to have it taken over by the Kuomintang. The play incorporates some new devices which go beyond the standard techniques that playgoers are familiar with.

QUESTION: Please discuss the language employed in the play.

ANSWER: There is not all that much that can be said about this. All I would like to point out is that in order to express life, language must be the language of real life. I know the life of the old society quite intimately, and am quite familiar with the ordinary folk who inhabited the teahouses. I know how they lived and therefore know how they talked. I began from this principle, but have added things here and changed things there so that the characters' lines are both their own and at the same time mine. For example, when Soothsayer Tang says, "I've given up opium . . . I've switched to heroin," the words are his own — he is thick-skinned. But I put into his mouth the following comment — "British Imperial Cigarettes and Japanese heroin — I'm being looked after by the big boys. Now, wouldn't you call that good fortune?" This shameless statement is quite believable from this thick-skinned character, under the conditions given; but at the same time, I use it to reveal the rapaciousness of the imperialists of that time, who were quite willing to destroy our lives as well as take our wealth.

QUESTION: Forgive a further question. Is there any basis in real life for a character like Director Shen, who appears on stage only to mouth his few "Yessiree's"?

ANSWER: Without a doubt. I have observed many high officers and officials of the Kuomintang. They were about as approachable as a child who has just lost both of his parents. They disdained to shake hands with others, or offered at best only a few cold fingers (cold because they lacked spirit)

which were quickly withdrawn. They were pretentious and conceited. When they were with people of the same rank they were vulgar and voluble, but when they spoke to those below them, they said as little as possible, in order to emphasize their own importance. Yes, those "yessiree's" are based upon reality. In short, language must come from life.

1958

About the Author

Lao She (1899-1966) is the pen-name of the writer Shu Sheyu, who was born in Beijing. In 1924 he went to England, where he was a lecturer in Chinese at the School of Oriental Studies, London University. It was in London that he wrote his first three novels. After his return to China in 1930 he taught at Qilu (Cheeloo) University in Jinan and Shandong University in Qingdao. He continued to write and during the war against Japan (1937-45), when he was in Chongqing, he took an active part in organizing the National Writers' and Artists' Resistance Association. Later he left China for the United States, where he gave lectures and continued to write until his return in 1949. He threw himself into the work of New China as a member of the Cultural and Educational Committee in the Government Administration Council, a deputy to the National People's Congress, a member of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Vice-Chairman of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers and Chairman of the Beijing Federation of Writers and Artists.

Before liberation he wrote many works of literature, including his best novel *Camel Xiangzi* (or *Rickshaw Boy*), to expose and denounce the old society. After the founding of New China he wrote the plays *Dragon Beard Ditch, Spring Flowers and Autumn Fruit, Fang Zhenzhu, Teahouse* and many other works which are loved by the people. He enjoys great prestige in China and was named a "People's Artist" and a "Great Master of Language".

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CAMEL XIANGZI

by Lao She

Camel Xiangzi is a classic novel of modern China written by the famous author, Lao She, during the 1930s.

The story focusses on the life of an honest and industrious rickshaw boy, Xiangzi, who suffers the cruel oppression common to the poor in "old" Beijing. Being young, strong and self-confident, Xiangzi wants nothing more than to save enough money to buy a rickshaw of his own to pull, rather than be bullied by those who own and rent rickshaws. He begins to build a decent life for himself when the woman he marries helps him buy a rickshaw. But his life takes a tragic turn when his wife dies, and he is forced to sell the rickshaw to pay off debts. Faced with nothing but personal misery and social corruption, Xiangzi is China's labouring class epitome of the disintegration of a human soul.

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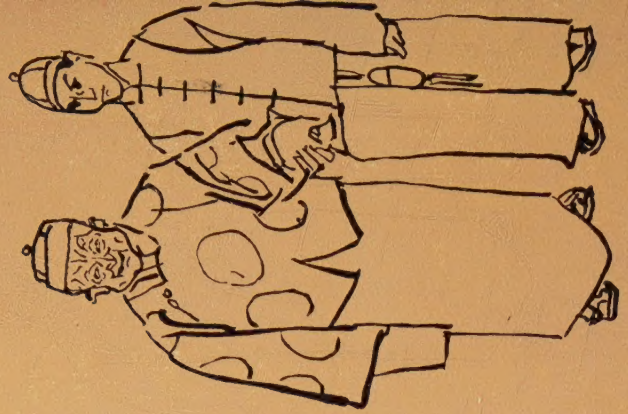
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